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Capturing complexity in conflict : a critical ethnography of nonprofit organization development through a social justice lens.

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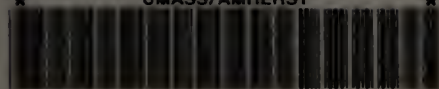
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CAPTURING COMPLEXITY IN CONFLICT: A CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHY
OF NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT
THROUGH A SOCIAL JUSTICE LENS

A Dissertation Presented

by

JOAN MARION MIKALSON

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

February 2004

School of Education

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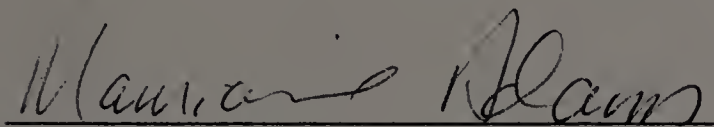
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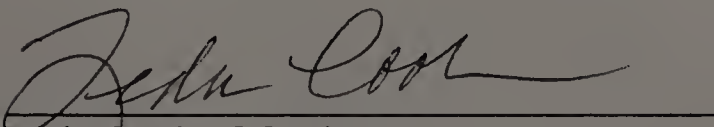
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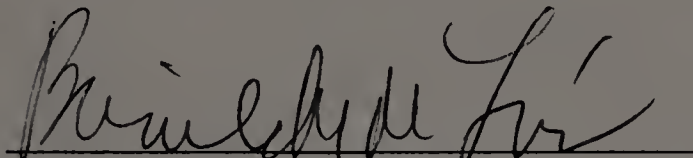
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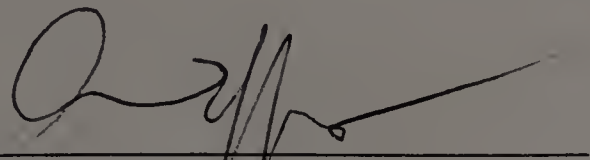
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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated:

To my sons,
Dan and Henry,
from whom I have learned so much.

To my mom
for all the days I witnessed her refuge of writing—
this dissertation wears her name.

and

To my dad
for the hope he left behind—
“Miss you.”

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Most of all, my most humble appreciation to Maurianne Adams, “I never would have completed this without you.”

Just as it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a village to accomplish a dissertation. My thanks to the village.

ABSTRACT

CAPTURING COMPLEXITY IN CONFLICT: A CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHY OF NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT THROUGH A SOCIAL JUSTICE LENS

FEBRUARY 2004

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This qualitative study investigates the individual, structural, and social systemic interconnections of conflict in a nonprofit organization. It confronts the simplicity of mainstream, popular resolution methods that typically over-individualize and frame organizational conflict as a personal problem. In contrast to traditional organizational diagnoses based on individual self-reporting of past conflicts and the reduction of conflict systems into isolated parts, this study captures organizational conflict interaction in the moment and emphasizes the complex entanglement of organizational conflict networks. In the tradition of ethnographic fieldwork, participant observation captures conflict-rich events over a compressed timeframe of sixteen months. Critical ethnographic elicitation methods filtered through a social justice perspective, probe insider stories to reveal patterns and themes of complex meaning systems that contribute to contextually grounded analyses.

This study intimately follows the conflict story within an animal welfare organization that dared to address conflict, and in doing so, managed to clarify

organizational identity, identify contradictions between their implicit values and explicit mission, and unravel routines and reform relationships to reorganize and reclaim their organization. Key findings include the role of conflict in revealing significant differences in underlying ideology and the relationship of conflict to gendered organizational processes. The approach to conflict resolution outlined in this study is invaluable to grassroots and social action organizations seeking to maximize conflict for organizational growth and development.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Overall, the term “conflict resolution” signifies the prospect of a positive outcome to conflict. However, to accomplish this, the practices of resolution overwhelmingly tend to minimize, smooth over or avoid conflict, rather than maximize conflict to disentangle the multiple meanings embedded in daily routines and relationships. Organizations traditionally over-simplify, over-individualize, and isolate conflict as a problem of personal difference and incompatibility that individuals must get over or work around. Conflict simmers in the hallways or bubbles up after hours, for to make an issue of conflict is to invoke organizational disharmony.

The over-emphasis on the individual as the conflict source, typical of much conflict resolution theory, translates into an idea that the quick fix of that individual is the conflict remedy. Consequently, individual-based organizational conflict resolution ignores greater structural and social systemic influences, and reproduces routine patterns of business as usual. This individualistic approach to conflict resolution overlooks complex interconnections and discounts contextual factors, and in its attempt to quickly contain the conflict, the prospect of organizational and social change is diminished.

Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this study is to capture the everyday lived experience of organizational conflict, to uncover complex, entangled interconnections embedded in relationships and routines of the individual self in context with the social self, and to

trace contributing constraints and contradictions within the organizational structure. This study investigates conflict at individual, structural, and social systemic levels within the general frameworks of personal differences and incompatibilities, organizational roles and structures, social identity and ideology. While the study of organizational conflict traditionally focuses on its manifestation at the interpersonal level, this study expands that focus to the overall organization. This study attempts to answer these questions: What is the relationship of conflict to the social self and the organizational structure? How do everyday routines and relationships contribute to the expression and suppression of organizational conflict—and vice versa? What is the overall role of conflict in organizations?

Significance of this Study

While many organizations ignore conflict in the hopes that it will disappear, many more organizations seeking to grow and develop desire the opportunity that conflict affords to maximize diversity and creativity, yet these organizations struggle with few resources on just how to use conflict as a positive component for organizational dynamics. This study intimately follows the conflict story within a nonprofit organization that dared to risk maximizing conflict, and in doing so, managed to clarify organizational identity, surface contradictions between implicit values and explicit mission, and unravel routines and reform relationships to reorganize and reclaim their organization. The approach to conflict resolution outlined in this study is invaluable to dynamic organizations seeking to achieve these development goals. By illustrating in-the-moment, contextually grounded analyses of organizational conflict,

this study seeks to raise critical consciousness of larger, unresolved organizational and social systemic issues.

It is often difficult when observing organizational conflict to distinguish between individual, idiosyncratic issues and critical, overlapping interpersonal, social and structural dynamics. Conflict management approaches tend to extract conflict from its relationship to the larger society, social dominance and social reproduction, while a greater understanding illuminates the travesty of conflict suppression and stresses the urgency to foster conflict for productive organizational development. This research will contribute to the existing knowledge on the experience of organizational conflict in substantive ways that stimulate methodologies to recognize, value, and realistically imagine the opportunity of conflict.

Limitations

This study is limited in content, process and standpoint, and focused on the description of conflict, not its resolution. I trace multi-linear processes of uncertainty within the entity of a single organizational culture, and in a compressed timeframe, elicit critical inquiry to capture patterns that raise consciousness of deeper contextual complexities.

A “disclaimer” to this dissertation is that while this study addresses the complexity of conflict, its analysis could be even more complex. Volumes of interdisciplinary literature address organizational conflict, making it difficult to highlight one aspect and not another. Furthermore, in my attempt to portray the “big picture” of organizational conflict studies, I risk misrepresenting the strengths and

weaknesses of theoretical perspectives. The primary use of theoretical presentations in the literature review and analysis is to provide an organizing framework capable of capturing the overall complexity of conflict versus in-depth descriptions.

While this is my first experience with ethnographic research, I have been a practitioner for the past thirteen years, and have experience in mediation, dialogue, facilitation and conflict resolution teaching and training. I have occupied many different roles in a number of organizations, the latest being higher education administration. My academic background in human resource development and social justice education provides me with skills and technical proficiencies in program diagnoses, design and development, pedagogical principles and theoretical understandings. My standpoint is that of a white, first generation college-educated, heterosexual, single woman with two adult sons. I was raised working class but my socioeconomic status has been both upwardly and downwardly mobile in my adult life. My inherent assumption is that participatory processes facilitate justice while resolution is not always possible, as inspired by Griffith (1998), “It is worth struggling for justice, knowledge and understanding, accepting that there will be no final victory” (p. 76).

Organization of this Dissertation

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 outlines my rationale and Chapter 2 establishes the context with an extensive multi-level organizational conflict literature review supplemented by a social justice perspective. Chapter 3 discusses the methodological process of a focused, critical ethnography involving participant-observation, fieldwork, focused conversations, document collection, and a focus group

session. Chapter 4 lays out the findings organized by research questions and conflict themes and Chapter 5 discusses these findings by re-applying the multi-level organizational conflict framework described in Chapter 2, culminating in research conclusions, implications for practice, unanswered questions and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

My experience as the observer of conflict resolution has been that organizations typically minimize conflict and over-emphasize personal incompatibilities. In this study, I seek to understand conflict beyond individual incompatibilities and to recognize conflict in relationship to greater organizational and social influences. To accomplish this, I rely on Rahim's (1986) multi-level approach to conflict as an organizing paradigm to analyze various conflict theories presented predominantly by Folger, Stutman, and Poole (1997).

In addition, I take a broader social justice perspective that offers an understanding of social groups beyond work groups and discusses the relationship of social groups to broader social systems as a way to understand conflict. I seek to explore both the organizational issues and the ways in which organizations reflect broader social issues that go beyond mere individual differences and personal incompatibility. Adding a social justice perspective to this conflict literature enables me to look at the ways in which individuals are members of social groups, which provides a different way of understanding social and cultural dynamics within workplace groups. People affiliate by virtue of social identity groups, thus importing broader dynamics into the larger social system of organizations.

Social Justice Perspective

Social group membership determines social position, access to resources, and the reproduction of inequitable socialization processes that are difficult to interrupt or change. Dominant social power determines what is important and what is not, and in effect, defines an overriding sense of reality for everyone. A social justice perspective takes into account social groupings based upon gender, sexuality, race ethnicity, class, age, and ability, and is concerned with raising the consciousness of imbalance in social power and empowerment (Griffiths, 1998).

A social group is comprised of members who share physical, cultural and social characteristics within social identity categories such as gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, class, ability, and age (Griffin, 1997). Differences in social identities and social group memberships stratify people within a hierarchy of status that emphasizes dominant and subordinate group memberships in the larger social system. These imbalances permeate everyday lives, infuse intimate social relationships and seep into organizational structures where rituals and routines are created, taken for granted and embedded into belief systems that reproduce over time (Jackson & Hardiman, 1997).

Woven throughout social justice concepts is an important term called “hegemony,” coined by Gramsci (Forgacs, 1988) which describes the flow of daily activities serving to build, reinforce and reproduce an exclusive network of relationships supporting needs and interests of some and not others (Young, 1990). Compliance with everyday, seemingly insignificant routines maintains a *status quo* which in turn maintains oppressive practices. For example, an organization depends on

its members to follow structural/systemic rules, generating a power struggle to define and retain rules maintaining the status quo. On one hand, compliance versus non-compliance set up conflict, but so does the power struggle over who defines standards. Viewing power relationally enables a focus on relationships and systems of reproduction. For example, men dominate leadership positions in organizations, while career opportunities for women are limited for lack of access to a power base.

For the purposes of this study, I refer to a social justice perspective based on the works of Iris Marion Young (1990), who posited the notion that group differences within the social construction of unequal social group status and social stratification manifests itself in oppression. Adding a social justice perspective to conflict analysis expands meaning and management, and helps to disentangle overlapping dynamics within conflict resolution. Organizational conflict operates at levels of complexity that overdetermines situations and makes it difficult to identify whether conflict is related to a person's lack of experience, incompetence or hidden prejudices. The burden of a social justice perspective is carried by social identity, as matters of both attribution and self-concept of stereotypes and cultural values. The addition of a social justice perspective helps to distinguish oppression from idiosyncratic issues.

Conflict Literature as it Relates to Social Justice

Conflict is defined as "the process in which one or both sides consciously interfere in the goal achievement efforts of the other side" (AMA, Byrnes, 1986); or "the interaction of interdependent people who perceive incompatible goals and interference from each other in achieving those goals" (Hocker & Wilmot, 1985).

Conflict analysis draws from many areas, including psychology, sociology, communication, management, organizational behavior and economics, and operates at individual, group and organizational levels (Rahim, 1986).

Conflict theories are predominantly represented in rational approaches extracting conflict from interactions disassociated from rules and routines and deeper societal issues. The conflict literature relevant to this study relates to multiple levels within organizations—individual, work group, social group, systemic, and structural levels.

Individual Levels of Conflict: What is Wrong with This Individual?

This section reviews conflict theories focusing on the individual and draws on the principle conclusion the individual and her incompatibilities with others are responsible for the conflict.

Psychodynamic Theory

Psychodynamic theory, one of the earliest traditional perspectives on conflict, proposed that individual psychological conditions influenced how a person handled conflict, and offered strategies to direct impulses, anxiety and aggression (Freud, 1947). Repressing aggressive impulses can lead to future frustrations and subsequent outbursts motivated by unmet needs (Folger, Poole, & Stutman, 1997). Called displacement, these repressed impulses sometimes lead to random attacks on less powerful persons in unrelated issues (Coser, 1956). For example, a once-competent administrator slips into the throes of failing health and takes a temporary medical leave

of absence. When he returns to work, he feels overwhelmed with a growing sense of doom and anxiety, symptomatic of depression, and forgets appointments and misses deadlines, a pattern inconsistent with his past performance. The moment he is questioned about his departmental work, he verbally attacks a co-worker, displacing pent-up feelings of overall frustration.

Adding a social justice perspective to this conflict allows for a deeper understanding of the situation—this is a man with mental disabilities who has lost the capacity to perform his job and such a disclosure may threaten his job status. His social identity has shifted from the socially dominant comfortable role of a capable administrator, to the uncertain subordination of a person with a mental disability. From a structural standpoint, his organization has no mechanism in place that allows for individual change in a network based on exclusive competence and ability.

Styles Theory

Blake and Mouton (1964) found people routinely adapt to conflict based on concern for others and/or concern for self. Identified as styles theory, this concern operates within the categories of avoidance, accommodation, competition, compromise and collaboration. An avoidance style denies the existence of conflict by employing tactics that are noncommittal, while an accommodation style exercises cooperation and harmony at the expense of self (Wilmot & Hocker, 1998). A compromising style portrays a give-and-take attitude; a competitive style favors individual concerns over others; and a collaborative style balances high concern for relationships with mutual

resolution of conflict. Overall, styles theory serves to simplify conflict and encourage people to simply choose the right style when faced with conflict.

However, the resolution of conflict depends on who is defining the issues, who is in charge, and what choices are available. Styles theory insufficiently assumes a common ground between parties and a relative balance of power (Pruitt & Rubin, 1986). In a supervisor/employee conflict, the supervisor is less likely to collaborate simply because she is in charge with less to gain from a subordinate, and in reverse, the employee most likely chooses avoidance with no advantage to winning a battle with the boss (Canary & Spitzberg, 1985).

Luloffs (1994) states that styles are easily recognizable but their link to individual and organizational conflict outcomes is unclear. Regardless what an individual perceives his style, conflict is shaped by interaction (Hocker & Wilmot, 1998). Styles theory individualizes conflict and disregards dynamics over time. Rather than one general approach, different relationships and contexts warrant different styles.

Styles theory offers a limited explanation of conflict based on values of individualization, confrontation and competition, and requires an ability to learn skills, make choices, and deliver on demand. A styles standpoint may inappropriately assume a relational Eastern world view is avoidance while not recognizing a Western cultural context, as in the case of an Asian male checking with his family before making a decision at work. What could appear as avoiding a decision in this case, is actually a collective, cultural approach to decision-making that includes families.

Additionally, a styles approach disregards social cues such as eye contact, and is crosscut by race, ethnicity, generation, and geography. Lucy, a Puerto Rican woman

living in the United States, was raised to avoid eye contact out of respect for authority. Her husband Michael, an African American man, was raised to defy the legacy of slavery through the deliberate use of eye contact. These different experiences make it difficult to practice merely one way with their biracial son. Lucy defers to her husband's way until they visit her parents on the island, where children respect elders by not making eye contact, and respect for age supercedes gender. While eye contact is not an issue with their Chicano friend, Gregory, his partner, Angela, recalls her southern Italian grandmother warning them to "cut-the-curse" of those who make extended eye contact too deeply into the soul. Different relationships and contexts warrant different styles, and effective communication supports the integration of culture that styles theory misses.

A social justice lens would add a cultural perspective to counter dominant values that judge those who don't relate in the same social manner as incompetent. Cultural differences in communication play out in various ways that may lead to confusion, misinterpretation, and conflict when expectations are not met.

Attribution Theory

Attribution theory focuses on personal characteristics to interpret behavior (Sillars, 1980). People tend to attribute positive characteristics to themselves and negative characteristics to others so that conflict hinges on individual judgments (Luloffs, 1994). Individuals typically place blame on the situation to justify their own behavior, and easily blame others for personal shortcomings. For instance, running late for a meeting, I blame a school bus, my car or the alarm clock, showing the situation

caused the problem. When you are late, I jump to the conclusion that you are probably late for everything—I personally attribute (blame) a pattern of lateness on you.

A social justice lens on attribution could reveal a potential mask on inflexible assumptions of prejudice and discrimination based on stereotypes of race, class, gender, ability, age, religion, or sexual orientation. For example, time is culturally specific—time presents a conflict for some and not for others. “She takes a lot of time off,” complained one boss regarding her secretary. “A lot of time off” was a day here and there—which occurred only recently—when this single parent of three young girls was faced with the crisis of a dying mother who needed 24-hour hospice care. In the comfort of her dominant role, the boss disregarded her secretary’s struggle and automatically attributed absences to flaws in personal disposition rather than her tenuous situation balancing personal and professional responsibilities.

Attribution offers a way to identify the unconscious, taken-for-granted power and privilege of those in dominant roles that define reality for others in lesser roles. A social justice lens helps name this positionality, raises awareness of internalized dominance, and expands understanding of the many dimensions of conflict and its resolution.

Verbal Aggressiveness Theory

Verbal aggressiveness theory attempts to explain verbal attacks (Infante & Wigley, 1986; Infante, 1987) in terms of missing argumentation skills. Those with low argumentation skills are more likely to attack others while people skilled in argumentation are able to argue effectively and determine major issues and support

positions. Argumentation is a positive trait related to successful organizational outcomes while verbal aggressiveness is a negative trait escalating conflict and damaging relationships (Infante, 1985).

From a social justice perspective, argumentation is culturally specific, supported by values of individuality and competition based on standard communication skills learned and rooted in educational attainment and class standing. For example, a person raised poor or working class may attend under-resourced schools deficient in communication skills training. People trained in these communication skills generally belong to mainstream populations and adapt easily into business cultures that tend to regard people without these skills as “less-than.” Women are easily tagged aggressive when deviating from expected behaviors, Asians are expected to be agreeable, and society is poised against the black man who raises his voice.

Reciprocity Theory

Reciprocity theory states that people respond reciprocally to how they perceive others treat them and freely make exchanges until they detect inconsistencies, at which point they adapt their behaviors to compensate (Rolloff & Campion, 1985). Reciprocity is strongly driven by perception. For example, two administrators from upper class, elite backgrounds perceive one of their employees—raised working-class-poor—as oppositional. All three are responsible for fundraising, yet differ in their approaches to bringing in money. Driven by their social identities, the working class employee advocates public grants for underrepresented populations, while her two upper class bosses prefer to mingle in social circles contributing to their foundation. Their

polarized views evolve into sarcastic remarks by the employee and avoidance by the administrators who override reciprocity by exercising greater power in executive decision-making.

Viewed narrowly, this employee is not reciprocating with the expectations of her bosses and could be perceived as insubordinate. Her bosses consult human resources and are coached on how to document a difficult employee. Their initial perception paves the road to an unfortunate intervention, which threatens employment and contributes to a hostile work climate. A social justice understanding would raise the consciousness of the Human Resources Director who could impact follow-up by these administrators before the situation escalates into impossible personality clashes or a work re-assignment. Unspoken expectations for behavior influenced by class background contribute to this employee feeling justified in fighting for the underdogs, and in doing so, she treaded on insubordination.

Social Confrontation Episodes Theory

Social confrontation episodes theory portrays conflict as a mutual activity erupting when taken-for-granted social rules are broken (Newell & Stutman, 1988). Rules are prescriptions for behavior learned and reinforced through socialization and acted out through episodes of expectations and negotiations. To resolve conflict, parties must agree on the legitimacy of social rules based on one's interpretations and subsequent actions.

Knowing the rules, formally and informally, determines organizational effectiveness. For example, one department historically competes against another and

conflict erupts when boundaries are crossed. Unless a greater power differential supercedes, broken rules must be acknowledged and re-negotiated to restore harmony. Instead the supervisor of one department criticizes the administrator of another department, reinforcing the informal rule that says, "don't trust that administrator and his department." Loyalty to these established rules disintegrates when the administrator offers one of the supervisor's workers a promotion to cross over to his department. By accepting his job offer, this worker incites conflict by perceived disloyalty to the unit. The administrator overpowered the supervisor by bending rules to fit his needs. Adding a social justice perspective to this scenario provides a way to factor in conflict variables rooted in organizational culture rewarding individualist values, personal achievement, competition and survival.

What's Promising/What's Left Out

Overall, a social justice analysis added to the individual level of organizational conflict expands explanations beyond mere incompatibilities and illuminates status quo practices. Psychodynamic theory provides a way to talk about internalized oppression as well as the ineffectiveness of containing conflict. Attribution theory raises awareness of the potential for blame rooted in culture or social identity, and underscores the need for a sophisticated consciousness to interrupt destructive practices often perceived as routine conflict. People in prominent positions often do not understand the cultural and social limits of homogeneity. Raising consciousness of harmful assumptions associated with group attributes interrupts stock stereotypes that contribute to conflict. Additionally, verbal aggressiveness demonstrates unfair stigmas of aggression

stereotypically labeling entire groups along class, race and gender categories.

Reciprocity theory shows how judgments are endorsed by what's typically valued in the larger society, and social confrontation episodes theory legitimates social rules upholding organizational functions.

These theories based on individual levels of conflict are missing strong connections to the larger society and while differences, perceptions, attributes and position alone do not create conflict, the ranking and ordering of these variables contributes to exclusionary systems suppressing conflict, ignoring power relationships, and limiting systemic change. The single Latina with three kids isn't a lazy worker; she's isolated by circumstances disregarded by her organization, forcing her into a double existence. Instead of smoothing over situations, conflict could be maximized by tracing relationship between the individual and the larger social system. Up to this point, the ensuing discussion has focused on individual levels of conflict coupled with a social justice perspective. Within organizations, different dynamics come into play as individuals form work groups that interact in complex ways with social group memberships. What follows is a discussion of conflict at the social and work group levels.

Work Group and Social Group Levels of Conflict: What is So Difficult About Organizational Relationships?

This section reviews relevant conflict literature across both work group and social group levels. Research supports the idea that internal and external factors, which increase the likelihood of conflict between individuals, based on social identity group

attributes are, at times, related to work group identities, and at other times, quite disconnected. Social group identities are not usually acknowledged in work groups (Kahn, et. al., 1964). In another study, Richard and Grimes (1996) found that a dichotomy exists between one's work group identity and one's social group identity, overridden by an organizational culture that intensifies the probability of conflict, and makes it difficult for minorities to fit in.

For example, a young Latino professional attends his first work-related conference on multicultural issues in organizations. Filled with enthusiasm, he volunteers as the regional chair for his Latino chapter. Upon hearing this, his (non-Latino) boss worries this newfound social group identity will compete with his work group identity and overall organizational commitment. The social group affiliation jeopardizes the Latino's career without his knowledge and over time he may feel a sense of alienation but won't know for sure because his boss, at the risk of discrimination, will never disclose his concerns openly. As time goes on, this Latino may feel unsatisfied and compelled to leave—just like Latino professionals before him. The unexpressed, latent conflict affects organizational culture, which negatively impacts minority retention.

Often, dominant organizational cultures force minorities to suppress the expression of their social identities (Jones, 1986). To survive, minorities assimilate to the prevailing organizational culture (Peters & Waterman, 1982). Otherwise, minorities vacate positions to the dismay of administration perplexed why it is difficult to retain underrepresented populations; it is not enough to simply post an affirmative action statement.

Work Group Conflict

Traditionally, work groups differ in job assignments and are most effective when members are equipped with diverse sets of job knowledge and few differences in values (Jehn, Northcraft & Neale, 1999). Different value systems contribute significantly to workplace conflict, although a certain amount of task conflict can stimulate productivity and creativity (Jehn, 1995). In most situations, work groups are results-oriented and rally behind the task of what has to get done, yet struggle to develop long-term work group relationships and productive work processes (McGrath, 1984; Kabanoff, 1985). In other words, work groups are usually clear about the bottom-line of what they have to do, yet have a difficult time consciously relating to who they are, how their work is interdependent on each other, and how to predetermine effective channels of communication (Jehn, 1997).

For example, it is non-threatening to discuss the substance of what jobs must get done based on hierarchical demand. Talking about how to reach those goals is more difficult because the process requires group facilitation and agreement and people usually avoid issues of power and authority. Work group relationships develop through trust and disclosure. In environments in which differences are minimized and social identities not recognized, it's risky to reveal personal information that may invite harmful evaluations and impact one's standing in the work group. For instance, in a heterosexist atmosphere it takes nerve for a woman to tell her co-workers she used to be a man and that her son still calls her "Dad." Withholding social identity group information limits her ability to develop strong organizational relationships.

Tuckman (1965) stated that work groups experience conflict through a natural process of “norming, storming, forming, and performing.” Unfortunately, organizations seldom provide the mechanisms needed to move comfortably through these stages, nor do work groups receive support to relate their conflicts to social dimensions outside the organization (Ginnett, 1990). The same undercurrents of power that exist throughout society are reproduced in organizations. The differences stacked by economic, political and social interests are embedded in everyday routines that mask a dominant ideology in organizations (Lannamann, 1991). Social identity discourse appears to be missing in the everyday talk of organizations (Kolb & Donnellon, 1994). The greater value of organizational harmony rewards behavior, keeps the peace, minimizes differences, suppresses conflict and expedites resolution.

Young (1990) described a hierarchy of professional culture based on the attainment of college degrees. People are categorized by classified/non-classified, unit/non-unit and clerical/professional designations with increased privileges of status, pay, responsibility, authority and autonomy. Work groups reproduce society’s class system, differentiated by professionals who hold educational degrees and classified workers who do not. Stereotyping of these categories leads to differentiation and polarization of entire groups intensified by negative perceptions, competition and hostility. During times of conflict, work groups differences build into an us/them phenomena (Sherif et al., 1961; Blake, Shepard & Mouton, 1964; Northrup, 1989). This leads to strategic alliances based on in-group and out-group loyalties and reinforced stereotypes of the “other” (Cooper & Fazio, 1979). The latest technological advances have created dramatic changes in organizations that often increase workloads

without increasing clerical staff or updating job classifications. Clerical staff feels under-appreciated and under-compensated, leading to growing resentment of administrators who are perceived as the power brokers of hiring and pay raises.

Social Group Conflict

The conflict literature emphasizes work group aggregates that socially categorize sets of people, such as faculty versus administration, and clerical versus professional staff. Generally speaking, identity is achieved, as in “vice president,” or ascribed, as in social group membership such as African American (Northrup, 1989). Kreisberg (1982) found that conflict raises consciousness of one’s social identity. Research on how social identity group influences conflict is limited, however, due to the lack of qualitative work examining individual understanding of social identity (Cook-Huffman, 2000). Social identities are both static constructs and fluid entities changing over the course of conflict, and serve as frames providing a context for conflict (Goffman, 1974). For example, a gender frame informs conflict from a woman’s point of view, and a class frame informs conflict from the perspective of class status. Multiple identities create the potential for multiple meanings—a work group identity (clerical staff) overlaps gender identity (woman) crosscut by social class identity (working class) thus providing multiple frames for understanding conflict.

Cook-Huffman (2000) identifies two organizing frames based on social identity. First, the contextual frame sets the context for meaning. The defining frame sets standards to define situations. A frame sets up an overarching belief system rooted in basic social identity group norms shared by a particular social group. For example, Jane

is an administrator at a public institution that informs her contextual frame (being part of a state agency), while her social identity as a woman provides another dimension of a contextual frame as well as a defining frame.

In another example, Mary and Sheila are professors in a small department. Both women are white, from similar backgrounds, raised-poor, first generation college graduates, and first generation Irish-American. Their defining frames exhibit pride and loyalty to ethnic heritage and an experience of upward mobility from poverty that says anyone can make it. They are united in their effort to block Latino groups looking for inroads to college because they believe the Irish never received such advantages, so why should Latinos?

These women oppose another department member, Athena, an African-American, 70-year-old professor, raised-poor, and the granddaughter of a former slave. Athena's defining frame motivates her to partner with the Latinos. As conflict unfolds, neither of these parties discloses the ideological differences of their defining frames. Instead, Mary and Sheila compound issues by attacking static constructs of social identity and try to delegitimize Athena's credibility by inferring she is too old to teach and is slacking off in her workload. Athena accedes to internalized subordination, struggles with powerlessness and avoids issues, while Mary and Sheila form a third party coalition with their Dean against Athena.

The Cook-Huffman frames provide a social justice application to organize the complex interfaces of work group and social group intersectionality, which are extremely difficult to separate. A contextual frame demonstrates oppression on multiple levels of interaction serving to reinforce socialization processes that reproduce

the status quo. These women demonstrate both fluid and static experiences of social identity that may influence the elimination of educational opportunities for another social group, and this conflict may stay protracted for years.

A Gender Lens on Organizational Conflict

Organizational literature is traditionally presented in gender-neutral terms that disregard underlying gender assumptions and dominant social patterns in organizations (Martin, 2000). At the same time, gender inequality is well documented, so it stands to reason that an understanding of gendered approaches would contribute to a better understanding of conflict within organizations. In a subtle example, the gender-bias inherent in job descriptions is seldom scrutinized. However, ads typically solicit masculine behaviors based on competitiveness rather than feminine behaviors based on cooperation. Diversity initiatives frequently enable women to get hired yet do little to change dominant, masculine organizational structures (Hochschild, 1989). This section introduces the latest literature on gendered approaches to organizational conflict.

Feminist Analysis. Instead of merely adding women to the dominant mix of men, feminist analysis strives to reconfigure frameworks to include both men and women (Pascall, 1997; Hughes, 2000). Carol Gilligan (1982) introduced relational female difference to identity development. Following her research, Belenky, et al., (1986) introduced women's ways of knowing. While the research of Gilligan and Belenky, et al., can be reduced to gender stereotypes, the actual strength of their work is in identifying gender themes manifest in both men and women that are significant but not exclusive to one gender. Feminist patterns signify relational, interpersonal

behaviors of receiving and collective reasoning, while masculine patterns signify individualistic, impersonal behaviors of mastering and individual reasoning (Baxter Magolda, 1992). Identifying gender differences makes it possible to identify gendered patterns of social domination in organizational processes (Ellsworth, 1992).

Dominant-Gender Organizations. Masculine approaches heavily influence organizational processes such that a dominant-gender social order is maintained (Acker, 1990). Organizational policies and procedures favor masculine approaches to doing business based on white male, heterosexual, middle class norms (Ely & Meyerson, 2000). Such masculine-biased organizations stereotype women as caretakers (Calas & Smircich, 1993). A more constructive approach utilizes feminist values of listening, nurturing, collaborating and peace making to strengthen organizations (DiStephano, 1990; Ely & Meyerson, 2000).

Ely and Meyerson (2000) contend masculine organizational structures and processes are embedded in organizational policies, procedures, networks and everyday interactions, and while appearing gender-neutral, these masculine organizational processes preserve implicit and explicit values such as individualism, survival of the fittest, champion behavior and hierarchical structures of control that devalue relationship-building (Ely & Myerson, 2000). Both Acker (1999) and Holvino (1999) contend that disentangling these processes requires multiple lenses applied simultaneously.

Gender from an Interactive Perspective. Gender is a fluid social construction of which all individuals act in variations of masculine and feminine ways. Feminist theory looks at social processes that value relationship building, empathy, collaboration and

peace building. Kolb (2000) identifies feminist norms of connection and relationship building as valuable conflict resolution tools and stresses the assets of feminist skill-building strategies such as appreciative conversations, interdependency, and mutual buy-in to problems. It's helpful to emphasize gender as an interactive dynamic rather than a difference. Meyerson and Kolb (2000) recognize that identifying gender in complex social processes across multiple organizational practices brings emphasis to male-dominant behaviors frequently internalized and enacted by women. While usually devalued, relational feminist processes provide powerful approaches to organizational change. Feminist-type skills of collaboration and power sharing are not easily adopted by organizational members who don't value an inclusive gender lens (Coleman & Rippin, 2000). An effective part of organizational conflict resolution entails feminist-based, oftentimes invisible, relational work, as opposed to typically masculine, visible, bottom-line problem solving.

The Myth of Rationality. Bounded emotionality, a term referring to the expression of emotions in organizations, contributes significant insight to organizational conflict literature (Mumby & Putnam, 1992; Putnam & Mumby, 1993; Martin, 2000). Traditional conflict resolution overwhelmingly results in objective, rational, methods that ignore emotions and perpetuate a myth of rationality making the display of emotions inappropriate (Putnam & Mumby, 1993). In the same sense, emotions are named differently for men and women in organizations.

For example, a female executive expresses negative concerns about the timing of reorganization in the context of staff morale. Her boss favors reorganization and views opposition with skepticism. When she confronts him, he asks if this is how she

acts with her husband at home. At the same time her co-worker (a man) expresses heated emotions, also opposing the reorganization. However, referring to this man's opposition, the boss claims to admire his expression of passion—he really cares about his work. This demonstrates a double gender standard judging the behavior of men and women differently in the same organization where men can disagree and women cannot.

In contrast, feminist approaches emphasize emotions as an important part of community. Recent studies of non-profit organizations staffed primarily by women reveal feminist ideology driven by feminist ways of doing business include emotions and link public with personal (Morgen, 1994; Martin, 2000).

The Gender Variable in Conflict Resolution. Traditional conflict resolution methods tend to be masculine-based, seeking techniques to separate the person from the problem and maintain neutrality whereas a feminine perspective puts more emphasis on relationships. Feminists understand people are possibly part of the problem (Menkel-Meadow, 2001). Gilligan (1986) stated that women value webs of relationships rather than a masculine hierarchy of rights and view life within a framework of connection supported by care and attachments that inspire an ethic of responsibility. Such a feminist approach views conflict as a problem of relationships rather than a contest of rights, and seeks to solve conflict in ways that people will not be hurt.

Conflict Styles in the Context of Gender. Gender role orientation represents learned patterns of gender characteristics such as masculine traits of aggressiveness, independence, competitiveness and assertiveness, versus feminine traits of emotionality,

sensitivity and cooperativeness (Broverman, et. al., 1972; Cook, 1985). In order to progress in organizations, women often adopt a masculine role orientation (Fagenson, 1990; Muldrow & Bayton, 1979; Power, 1988). While both men and women are able to access high and low levels of masculinity and femininity, and those individuals who possess high levels of both masculinity and femininity maintain an androgynous orientation (Brewer, 2002).

Field Theory

Field theory presents conflict in a framework of relationships based on context, climate, and life space (Lewin, 1951). In the pursuit of goals, one moves through life spaces and experiences conflict in the form of obstacles. Climate is an enduring quality of the surrounding environment determined by interdependent activities, in which gains and losses are divided cooperatively or competitively. Field theory places heavy emphasis on perception developed from climates of supportiveness or defensiveness. Life space is determined internally and overlooks issues of social dominance and social identity (Folger, 1997). Barriers are depicted as something to overcome based on ability and freedom to make choices. The conditions for supportive and defensive climates are valuable guideposts for constructive conflict dynamics.

Game Theory

Game theory also emphasizes interdependence and explains conflict in terms of a game with rewards, costs, strategies, and skills (von Neuman & Morgenstern, 1944; Tedeschi, Schlenker & Bonoma, 1973). Strategically calculating moves and

countermoves results in a winner and loser. Game theory provides concrete choices as in how to buy a car; however, it fails to integrate social interaction, communication, and culture into organizational dynamics (Steinfatt and Miller, 1974). In terms of social justice, game theory assumes people know their options and share mutual advantages and conflict can simply be reduced to wins and losses. Disregarding social and historical implications, game theory also assumes a Western perspective based on independence, competitiveness, and the ability to control one's destiny.

Coordinated Management of Meaning

Another perspective building on the relevance of context is coordinated management of meaning (CMM) which focuses on the processes of meaning making (Pearce 1976, Pearce and Cronen, 1980). Central to CMM, events have distinct meanings resulting in subsequent actions shaped by context, relationship, self-concept, and culture. Perception and understanding are based on a foundational worldview creating a filter of belief systems and cultural patterns. Self-concept and life expectations create life scripts with contracts of expectations for relationships. In a series of episodes, messages are sent, received, interpreted and managed into meanings that create an interlocking rule system, coordinated into follow-up actions based on agreement or disagreement.

The CMM model is most effective in conflict analysis of parties in long-term relationships exchanging individual meanings attached to shared events and working through a ladder of meaning to understand individual interpretations. For instance, in a simmering conflict within a work group of various races and gender, one young woman

does not appear to fit. Although she's skilled at the computer, and considered a good worker, she does not mingle with her co-workers. While no one is openly hostile, a pattern of avoidance settles into the work environment.

Applying the CMM model determines this young woman struggles with the culture of an aging work group. Tracing through life scripts and messages reveals conversations in which the work group addresses this woman like a child based on her age and perceived lack of experience. In terms of self-concept, she does not have the work experience or the confidence to overcome the judgments of older co-workers. In the expression of culture, she comfortably identifies with her age group, which alienates her co-workers.

Although an interdependent work group, the young woman's tasks require interaction with the public, not with co-workers. Conceivably, she could function indefinitely within a defensive climate. In terms of social justice, this could be a case of ageism where generational conflict brews between work group and social group expectations. Exchanging this information through a CMM ladder helps this work group understand individual meanings and redefine relationships within a supportive context of age.

CMM is a sophisticated, complex system of layers defining the individual in relationship to an overall system. While recognizing difference in alignment with a social justice contextual framework, its hierarchy of difference is underdeveloped and does not address an underlying power factor in interactions between unequals (Baker Miller, 1976).

What's Promising/What's Left Out

The conflict literature relating to work groups and social groups provides yet another way to organize the complexities of conflict. Within a work group, conflict reflects issues of functionality, status, competence, and various sorts of salient idiosyncrasies presenting difficulties in getting the job done. The social group analysis adds multiple sets of factors related to gender, race, class, dominance, subordination, cultural values, attributes, and stereotypes. A gender lens on conflict introduces a gender role orientation accounting for masculine and feminine traits that contribute to an understanding of gendered organizational processes.

The work by Cook-Huffman (2000) on frames integrates conflict with social identity development. Context captures the flow of the socialization process and reproduction of the status quo beliefs and values. Field theory integrates context, perception, and climate in relationship to social justice, and game theory presents a rational, objective approach perpetuating "survival of the fittest." Coordinated management of meaning (CMM) ties conflict to a foundation of worldviews and links meaning to cultural differences in order to orchestrate a more integrated conflict process. The discussion to this point, is one of individual, work group, and social identity group levels of conflict within organizations. A continued look at organizational levels of conflict introduces variables of the organizational system and structure.

Organizational Levels of Conflict: What is the Relationship Between the Structure/System and Conflict?

As established earlier, conflict literature typically over-emphasizes the individual while organizational conflict research tends to separate strands of conflict analysis focused on single levels of conflict (Sheppard, 1992). Historically, the perception of conflict within organizations has evolved. At one time, organizations were based on authoritative structures in which conflict was considered dysfunctional, to be contained or suppressed. As organizations developed a concern for human relations, conflict was viewed as a healthy, inevitable process to be managed for the sake of organizational harmony. In its latest incarnation, organizations are less hierarchical, more team-based units of diverse constituencies, with acceptance of conflict at the heart of organizational existence (Kolb, 1992). Conflict is perceived and handled differently, as organizational configurations evolve.

Organizational frameworks provide a context for ideas and information. When faced with new situations, stored schema make practical sense of what's happening and what to expect (Huckin, 1982). Bolman and Deal (1997) identify four basic frameworks—structural, political, human resource, symbolic—of organizations. Structure operates on rules, roles, and policies to maintain peace in an orderly chain of command to manage conflicts. In contrast, a political frame functions on the interests of those in power in which resources are limited, and conflict is considered quite normal. A human resource frame draws on people as its most valuable asset, supported by open policies within a climate of self-leadership in which conflict emerges to satisfy shared interests. Bolman and Deal continue to describe a symbolic frame that unifies

symbols and traditions in which conflict serves to negotiate meanings. This concept of organizational frameworks links conflict to organizational configurations beyond the individual.

Structural Perspective

An organizational structure is rooted in rules, roles, and resources (Thomas, 1992). Such a structure reflects reward systems, procedures, job classifications, communication channels, chains of command, intervention mechanisms, and task interdependence (Rahim, 1986). Changing structural features such as organizational policy, adjusting team composition, transferring employees, reassigning tasks, redefining roles, enhancing rewards, shifting leadership styles, and eliminating external threats affects organizational relationships and alters conflict. In a social justice perspective, organizational policies and procedures subtly reproduce inequities that endorse the dominant order (Hardiman & Jackson, 1982; Pharr, 1988). Rules, roles and the perception of scarce resources reproduce processes of control reaffirming formal authority and the status quo; conflict poses an opportunity to expose these fixed structures.

In an example of structural conflict, a woman's struggle with cancer compromises her physical ability to maintain the rigors of workplace routines, and she gives notice of retirement on her 60th birthday. A person is hired to slowly assume her responsibilities, and everyone is sympathetic with her until she announces four months into the transition that she can't afford to retire. The new person wonders if she is out of a job and her work group wonders how they will tolerate another two years of

spotty attendance. Structure (retirement policy rules) impacts social identity (person with disabilities) which impacts work group (role dependent on competent function) and the individual who may be out of a job (scarce resources). This complex composite of conflict requires delicate attention before it is reduced to a mere interpersonal confrontation on a bad day.

Systems Perspective

Closely linked to structure, systems represent patterns of social relations reproduced over time. A systems perspective relates individual components, processes, and relationships to the entire system and links the purpose, population, and culture of each office, department and division to the larger organization (Sickles & Merchant, 1996). Open systems' thinking emphasizes internal, external, social, and technical interdependencies (Emery & Trist, 1972; Weisbord, 1987). Open systems require solutions often revealing deeper issues embedded in routines and policies. Systems generate organizing forces to maintain stability and endurance and can only be analyzed within the context of its entirety.

Viewing conflict as a system within a system reveals processes operating cooperatively and power structures serving systemic functions (Wilmot & Hocker, 1998). Conflict situations draw upon networks of relationships operating in cycles that determine deeper issues and contradictions upholding dominant systems (Martin, 1992). Worker's needs wedged within institutional control commonly lead to conflict suppression or the isolation of those opposing the system (Kolb & Putnam, 1992).

Dispute Systems Design

Customized dispute systems are the latest trend in organizational conflict resolution in which outside consultants gather input from insiders to design sophisticated systems (Ury, Brett & Goldberg, 1988; Constantino & Sickles Merchant, 1996). The first step is diagnosing general sources of conflict and existing mechanisms for resolution. Next, consultants recommend a dispute design proposal, implementation timeline, and evaluation method. The chief goal is a systematic process to maximize conflict in its early stages, to preserve relationships, and addresses inflexible rules creatively (Stitt, 1998).

From a social justice perspective, systems designs move beyond the usual individualization of conflict, yet miss underlying issues stratified by social inequities and power imbalances that protect the status quo (Putnam, 2000). Formal dispute systems deter underrepresented members and those in subordinate positions from making conflicts public, especially when the problem involves a superior. While outside consultants restructure functional patterns, it is virtually impossible to prescribe a dispute system design intervention that is organic to the organization (Littlejohn & Domenici, 2001). Formal procedures tend to reproduce pseudo-legal systems focusing on the individual isolated from the organizational system, and tend to formalize conflict in overly rational ways (Putnam, 2001). Conflicts have complex meanings that change over time and are difficult for dispute systems to address.

Structuration

Systems and structures come together in structuration to recreate one another in routinization of habitual, taken-for-granted processes (Giddens, 1984).

Contradictions are inherent to systems and grow from tension between stability and change and competition and cooperation (Argyris & Schon, 1978). For example, an organization that cannot meet its diversity hiring goal claims qualified individuals from underrepresented groups just don't apply. Further scrutiny reveals a prime applicant pool routinely filled by white part timers referred through a network of friends. Since most full time employees start this way, they tend to overlook this contradictory hiring practice that maintains a dominant culture of homogeneity and privilege.

Using Giddens' (1984) analysis, this hiring compliance may be submerged in consciousness, operating on three levels of awareness and action. Giddens identifies unconsciousness as a state of little or no awareness, practical consciousness as a state of understanding without taking action, and discursive consciousness as a state of sophisticated understanding willing to undertake action to impact change. Most organizations operate in practical consciousness, well aware of what's going on but saying nothing to interrupt the comfort of daily routines and protect their self-interest. Developing discursive consciousness builds capacity to expose hidden conflicts within systems and produce new variations of constructive organizational change and socially just conflict resolution at individual and organizational levels. Exposing this hiring mispractice and proposing an intervention to restructure part time employment to strategically reach out to minorities would diversify the cultural composition of this organization. While insightful to conflict and the importance of consciousness,

structuration does not address the greater cultural and social dimensions that a social justice lens provides.

Administration

Top executives are usually white males with decision power over organizational systems and structures that establish organizational flow and influence how conflict is handled (Powell, 1991). Most executives deal with conflict privately and informally and bypass systemic issues to accommodate the existing dominant structures rather than create change (Merrill, 1995). In other words, executives tend to operate in routine ways that work around known problems. Although research on executive conflict management is limited, decisions usually emanate within insulated circles of their peers, far removed from the everyday realities of organizational members (Starbuck & Milliken, 1988). Senge (1992) argues that executive team agreement is a myth promoting suppression of disagreements and the illusion of administrative cohesion.

While many executives operate organizations along linear mechanisms of control, organizations are complex, interdependent systems of change. Non-hierarchical systems of open communication channels promote organic, holistic workplaces that value relationships and creativity. While executives may set direction, they do not control everything, and solutions emerge when staff are empowered to make important decisions at each level where relationships are built (Lewin, Regine, 2000).

What's Promising/What's Left Out

The conflict literature relating to organizational levels provides multiple views of complex conflict dimensions and reveals a relationship of conflict to structural and systemic interfaces accessing rules, roles, resources and relationships. A structural change institutionalizing paid family leave would eliminate conflict for the Latina caring for her dying mother. For the woman who can't retire, a structural condition triggers conflict and defensive organizational culture blocks individual values of self-respect, age, seniority, and past contributions. Superseding workplace demands focus on production, competency, and ability, supporting the needs and interests of some, but not all. Dispute systems design does not guarantee interventions that might alter the status quo and fails to critically confront a pervasive ideology of organizational harmony. With further development, dispute systems may provide inroads to expand the view of conflict in ways that enlarge conflict for constructive change and more responsive organizations. Giddens' theory of structuration points to patterns within systems and structures of organizations to maximize conflict and discursive consciousness training could heighten awareness and train employees to identify cracks in the system.

Regarding organizational administration—how in touch is it with the complex nature of conflict? What instrument could measure levels of sophistication with a social justice lens? Could administration benefit from understanding social identity, discursive consciousness, and systemic/structural links to conflict? Would it be interested? What mechanisms would illuminate complex social factors in routine

procedures and policies? In the following chapter, I justify a methodology to capture the complex dimensions of conflict these questions raise.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Ethnography

In this study I employ qualitative research to elicit critical meanings and contributing factors within the complex dynamics of nonprofit organizational conflict, while at the same time, integrating participant perspectives and researcher insights (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). By incorporating ethnography as my methodology, I intentionally departed from traditional organizational conflict assessment methods that are based on self-reporting techniques (Wolcott, 1990; Doorman, 1991; Muecke, 1994). Instead, I observed in-the-moment conflict interactions and traced multiple routines and relationships over a time span of approximately sixteen months. I added a critical ethnographic methodology to the traditional ethnographic framework of conventional inquiry in order to position this study for consciousness-raising and subsequent action taking (Thomas, 1993).

As noted in the preceding chapter, I recognize a need for organizational conflict research methods that draw out more nuance-layered data than those of traditional approaches. By and large, organizational conflict assessments fall into the categories of quantitative, qualitative, observant or participant-generated, and focus on conflict processes, relationships or outcomes. Very little is written about conflict assessment, and conflict resolution training tools are limited (Olson-Buchanan et al., 1998). Many conflict assessments are in the form of post-event surveys based on individual perceptions and self-reporting, which requires individuals to recall the

conflict, often with bias (Wilmot & Hocker, 2000). Other conflict assessments are tied to specific levels of organizational conflict (Kilmann & Thomas, 1975; Putnam & Wilson, 1982; Rahim, 1983). Mikalson (2001) provides an extensive review of these assessments.

In addition, I wanted a research method to capture the complexities, nuances, and interactions of organizational conflict from a social justice perspective based on social identities and social positionalities. Such research is rare in the conflict literature and the best example I am aware of is a dissertation regarding the impact of social identities on conflict within a formal organization (Koski, 2001). She employs ethnography of communication (EC) as a research method to observe and listen for rich points, paradoxical moments of conflict that serve as sources of meaning (Agar, 1994). It wasn't until Koski's fifth month of participant-observations in a service organization that, in a routine meeting, a rich point surfaced to reveal deeply embedded cultural patterns of meaning. I attempted to capture conflict in this same manner and to connect its meaning to greater organizational and societal structures.

I also employed ethnographic methods to provide a lens of discovery and openness to uncertainty. Often applied in sociocultural communities to increase understanding, address problems and impact change, ethnographic research features participatory methods in comprehensive, context-sensitive, natural settings (Stewart, 1998; Lecompte & Schensul, 1999). Van Maanen (1988) described ethnography in exciting ways that were transferable to the world of conflict, stating that, "ethnographies are portraits of diversity in an increasingly homogeneous world" (p. xiii). Oftentimes mainstream conflict resolution methods suppress legitimate

differences that might emerge in organizational conflict. "By pointing to the choices and restrictions that reside at the very heart of social life," Van Maanan, (1988, p. 1) claimed that ethnography was an appropriate tool to uncover critical organizational conflict patterns of organizational compliance or non-compliance, and reproduction or change.

Critical Ethnography

Additionally, Van Maanan (1988) stated that ethnography was shaped by the disciplines from which it was launched, in this case, a critically conscious, social justice, social change perspective. My study is poised to contribute to the literature findings that detail how organizations can use conflict in ways that contribute to organizational development and transformation. To accomplish this, I added critical ethnography as "a style of analysis and discourse embedded within conventional ethnography...with a political purpose to use knowledge for social change...invoking social consciousness and societal change" (Thomas, 1993, p.3-4). Critical ethnography averts "domestication" (Thomas, 1993, p. 8) and circumvents complacent, socially unresponsive research that merely complies with *what is*. Critical ethnographic studies include postmodern approaches (Lyotard, 1988; Cullum-Swan & Manning, 1992; Latimer, 1984; Denzin, 1988), deconstruction and social inquiry (Pfol, 1990; Seaton, 1987; Cobb & Rifkin, 1991), participatory action (Whyte, 1943), action research (Schleiser, 1974; Alinsky, 1969; Walton & Gaffney, 1991; Levine, 1982; Cohen, 1991), and participatory research (Freire, 1972; Castellanos, 1985; Dearruda, 1990; Heaney, 1983; Maguire, 1987; Smith, 1990; Davenport, 1990).

Social justice research places a methodological emphasis on social group relationships and interactions (Nagda, et al., 1995; McGee-Banks, 1997; Hurtado, 2000)

Critical ethnography allows me to apply a contextual social justice lens to the traditional study of conflict. It provides the means to draw multiple relationships and to view, reflect, question and critique the content of the study as well as the process and practice of research (Thomas, 1993). For example, critical ethnography made it possible to personalize my hunches of inquiry in selecting interview participants and probing conversations related to the evolution of the conflict. I shared data and sought feedback from participants in shaping the analysis. Also, I asked participants how they viewed my participation and research methods to explore how it might have impacted this study. Finally, critical ethnography provides a way to lobby for social consciousness and social change and in this case to lobby for the amplification of conflict as a tool of organization development.

Site Selection

This study gravitates around a particular type of nonprofit organization that is not devoted to the bottom line but has intentionally established procedures and policies. The organization as the following profile: (1) composed of distinct social identities; (2) engaged in ongoing conflict with an unforeseen outcome; (3) community-based; (4) nonprofit; (5) ideologically diverse; (6) committed to a compelling issue; and (7) has all-volunteer members (unrestricted by a paycheck). This type of organization is different from one entrenched in a rigid structure of bureaucratic constraints.

The Guardians (pseudonym) organization was chosen for this study because it fit the characteristic profile and, at the time, was in the midst of chronic conflict resembling a storming stage of development (Tuckman, 1977). A nonprofit, all-volunteer animal welfare organization, Guardians is committed to providing and promoting humane treatment of companion animals (see Mission Statement, Appendix D), and is supported by fund-raising activities including donations, adoption donations, membership dues, grant writing and the sponsorship of periodic events such as tag sales, bake sales, rabies clinics, lunches and picnics.

Site Access

I gained access to this organization through one of its longtime members who, in a passing conversation, happened to comment on escalating conflicts in the midst of the group's application for official 501(c) 3 nonprofit status. Without prior affiliation or vested interest, my curiosity about what could be going on led to an invitation to a board meeting. In attending this meeting in September of 2001, my initial observations confirmed an exciting opportunity that offered critical timing in which I could study the emergence of organizational conflict within a unique social-cultural identity group (Gersick, 1994).

Researcher's Role

I joined the Guardians organization with the explicitly stated intent of legitimate membership for participant observation, without holding an official role, without engaging in controversies, and by relinquishing voting rights in officer

elections in order to observe impartially. Participation in non-controversial activities, such as fundraising, provided a way to contribute to the good of the organization and interact with members. The Guardians' Board of Directors formally approved this research at its January 29th, 2002, meeting (see Organizational Consent Form, Appendix A), with the explicit understanding that research would not include consultation or the expectation of conflict resolution. My intention for this study was to offer Guardians a process for mapping the complex dynamics of their organizational conflict and provide a critical reflective tool for its ongoing organizational development and growth.

Consent/Confidentiality

Participants signed a voluntary consent form to ensure actual names and identities of participants and the organization would not be disclosed. Pseudonyms were created to guarantee confidentiality (see Individual Consent Form, Appendix B). An anonymous demographic questionnaire was distributed in which participants revealed social identity, motivation, interest and length of service with the organization (see Participant Information Sheet, Appendix C). Participants had the right to withdraw from my research at any time and censor parts of their conversations (but never chose to do so). An agreement was established with Guardians that additional written permission would be secured for the use of materials in any way other than in the context of this dissertation or in subsequent, related publications or presentations.

Hopper Effect

Informed consent is a necessary procedure posing the possibility for an unintended “hopper effect,” in which participants, conscious of an observer, may behave differently in meetings (Arenas, 2001). To minimize this effect and to protect the data collection process, I maintained awareness of role in the context of routine business meetings and interviews (Goffman, 1963; Horowitz, 1983; Adler & Adler, 1987). Also, through conscious reflection, I routinely reviewed research dynamics and the process of data collection and analysis (Thomas, 1993). In the same sense, conscious close positionality provided a research advantage that reduced the tendency to overly dramatize the participants’ experience (Czarniawska, 1998). Familiarity contributed favorably to trust building with Guardians as well as the conditions for a participant-centered, realistic portrayal of organizational conflict. The members of this organization appeared unusually mission-focused and passionately engulfed in organizational issues while undistracted by outside observation.

Research Participants

Guardians is an all-volunteer, nonprofit organization of approximately twenty members, representing a variety of age groups, educational levels, and economic status. Members are predominately single, white women. The organization is situated in a New England residential/rural town renowned for its political engagement, activism, cultural expression, and concentration of academic institutions. Many Guardians’ members identify themselves as animal advocates with regard for the welfare and rights of animals. Frances (a Guardians’ member) notes ideological

differences, in that animal rights members envision animals without cages, and animal welfare members envision animals in extra large cages. Some members are vegetarians, others are vegans, and most oppose wearing animal fur.

Participant Access

Over the course of this study, access to all participants became an issue. As the conflict intensified, so did the division between members. This meant that not all parties on all sides contributed to interviews because two parties “on the other side” (Helga and Gertrude) were inaccessible. Without personal reflection from these two individuals, this study is missing the full “conflict story” and how they might have influenced the course of conflict as well as its final analysis.

Organizational Structure

The Guardians organization congregates in the community room of a local bank for bi-monthly evening board sessions, and in other various places for its eight-committee meetings, held at least once between board sessions. Members sponsor numerous functions and activities, such as a gift-wrapping fund-raiser at a local bookseller, an animal rights video showing, and a public protest against wearing animal furs.

Board meetings are conducted in strict adherence to *Robert's Rules of Order*, and officers are elected annually for President, Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer, along with a three-member Board of Directors. Eight individual standing committees share decision-making and submit reports and recommendations to the

Board and organization at-large via meetings, email and conventional mail. These committees include Nominating, Education/Publicity/Outreach, Ethics, Finance, Fundraising, Membership, Shelter/Foster Care/Adoption, and Tax Exempt Application.

Data Collection

Participation and Observation

My role as a researcher was that of participant observer with access to obscure information and key informants (Jorgensen, 1989). As a participant, I engaged in activities and attended meetings and events in order to get to know members. As an observer, I watched and recorded the activities and flow of the organization. Simultaneously experiencing the role of insider and outsider, I waited for a conflict-rich event while documenting the organization. I became familiar with formal organizational roles as well as with informal social networks and gathered data that might reveal patterns, themes and meaning systems embedded within this organization (Spradley, 1980). During the course of this 16-month study (August 2001 through November 2002), I attended one annual meeting, three board meetings, and three committee meetings. Separate from meetings, I tagged along for pizza twice, and occasionally interacted with members over coffee.

Data was collected predominantly by using the standard ethnographic technique of fieldwork whereby dynamics in the natural settings of routine board and committee meetings were observed and documented by journal note taking and

audiotape recording (Wolcott, 1996). These techniques, and the on-going participant-observer role, revealed potential conflict-rich events in which to probe in greater depth. It is important to note that by casting a wide research net, I was merely recording routine information when the conflict-rich event occurred. Since fieldwork is about recognizing patterns, and writing ethnography is about expressing those patterns, the data collection framework was organized around domains of analysis to systematically index, code, sort, and re-sort for patterns and relationships (Goodall, 2000).

Traditional organizational conflict resolution practice tends to separate conflict from its organizational embeddedness, underplay dominant rules and routines, de-emphasize social-cultural diversity, and disassociate societal factors. Attempting to go beyond these dynamics, to capture a comprehensive generation of contextual organizational conflict data, the organizing framework for data collection and analysis included the domains of interpersonal, work group, social identity group, and structure; concepts that I elaborated on in the previous chapter.

Document Collection

In another effort to move past the traditional research over-emphasis on the individual, I gathered data related to the organizational framework in order to provide a context for meaning (Deal, 1997). Frameworks implicated an overall organizational structure of conditions rooted in rules, roles, and resources (Thomas, 1992). My structural approach to conflict examined rewards, policies, procedures, task interdependence, communication channels, chains of command, intervention

mechanisms, economic streams, etc. (Rahim, 1986). These elements of structure contribute to micro-processes of control that serve to reaffirm formal authority and endorse a dominant order (Pharr, 1988). I viewed public and private organizational documents including letters, emails, meeting agendas, meeting minutes, contracts, scrapbooks, and the Guardians web page in order to obtain language and representation related to mission, incorporation, bylaws, history, policy development, and agreements (see appendices).

Probing Conversations

Instead of relying exclusively on structured interviews of members, this study included reflective, informal, face-to-face, one-on-one, in-person conversations with four participants conducted on separate occasions following conflict-rich board or committee meetings. Through the use of routine elicitation tools such as paraphrasing, open-ended and circular questioning, I encouraged members to “say more,” and to reflect on individual perspectives related to the organizational network and structure. I did not use an interview guide because I wanted to probe and respond as the conversation developed around their understanding of what was going on, what they believed they were trying to do and how they understood the conflict. This provided informal information and a group context to filter members’ perspectives within the scope of specific events.

Focus Group

My final information source was a focus group that allowed me to probe deeper into issues related to work and social groups (held November 21, 2002). I gathered those participants who were willing to talk with each other about their understanding of the conflict, the dynamics, the resolution and its aftermath. This included Ariadne, Frances, Rachel, Veronica and Angelina (Angelina's two children as well).

Verification of Data Sources

Member Checking and Outside Readers

I routinely solicited member checks from participants and incorporated their feedback to modify drafts of fieldwork, descriptions, and interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I conducted regular peer reviews with colleagues, including a consultation with a conflict resolution consultant/professor. A colleague, unrelated to the conflict field, read this study to check for accuracy of interpretation and traces of possible researcher bias. These sources were triangulated to emphasize conflict patterns and themes (Denzin, 1978).

Data Management and Analysis

I taped and transcribed meetings and interviews. The texts of three conflict-rich meetings (August 30, 2001; November 13, 2001; and December 1, 2001) along with a follow-up focus group session (November 21, 2002) provided data for analysis

in this study. In addition to the four interview-conversations, this study culminated in the finished product of a social-cultural profile of complex processes, theoretical relationships, and matrices of themes critically linked to organizational conflict (Fetterman, 1989).

I manually transcribed every meeting and interview for the opportunity to re-think and reflect on the data and develop an overall sense of what was happening in this organization. Transcriptions, field notes, and documents were reduced by coding themes and categories based on Tesch's (1990) eight-step procedure to systematically analyze textual data. First, I *identified topics* and *clustered similar topics*, then *formed columns of major topics*, and *assigned code names* and colors. After re-reading the data, I *tagged segments of text* with color-specific code names, *merged codes into categories*, and *reduced categories into grouping topics* that related to each other. I *cross-referenced categories* to show relationships and interconnections, and *reassembled these categories into themes* grouped by research questions. These methods allowed me to organize and analyze the story of this organization's conflict, both individually and holistically. These findings are described in Chapter 4 with an interpretive discussion following in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS OF THE DATA

Introduction

Chapter Four presents constellations of themes that emerged from the data collection of three meetings, four interviews and one focus group session. First, I will describe the conflict story line as it unfolded, the primary participants and the sequence of several conflict-rich events. Then, I will extract major themes organized by my research questions.

Research Questions

As noted earlier, my research questions ask the following:

- What is the role of conflict in this organization?
- What is the relationship of conflict to the social self and the organizational structure?
- What routines and relationships contribute to the expression and suppression of organizational conflict—and vice versa?

Conflict Story Line

Guardians [pseudonym] had been in existence for twelve years when the organization finally incorporated and experienced the conflict on which this study is based. The group's mission, to provide foster care and adoptions for lost and found animals, primarily cats, has remained consistent. According to its longest-serving president, Helga, the first large disagreement occurred in the group's first year. The

issue was whether or not the organization should care for feral cats. Some members left the organization to undertake this effort on their own initiative. Approximately five years later, Guardians survived another conflict involving litigation. Finally, in its twelfth year, Guardians accomplished official incorporation as a nonprofit, tax exempt organization.

Most long-term members fondly recall Guardians' first leader, Violet, as the "heart and soul" of the organization. Perceived as a kind woman, she moved out of state about six years after the group formed. At that time, Guardians was loosely organized around a number of people who adopted cats and occasionally raised funds through tag sales. Just prior to Violet's departure, she invited members to her home and asked them to organize more formally to carry on the work. The group decided they needed a formal president and when asked who would undertake such responsibility, Helga, the group's "lost and found" person and one of its longest standing members, volunteered.

Most members were grateful that Helga stepped forward since they were a loosely knit group primarily driven to help cats rather than to maintain an organizational structure. Under Helga's leadership, Guardians rarely met formally. Instead, they usually gathered together informally during and after tag sales. One member, Frances, recalled the group placing about four to five cats a year in homes, but not doing as much organizational outreach as she thought could have been done during this period. Frances noticed an increased bonding between members when her shopowner sister donated \$1,000 worth of socks to Guardians for their tag sales. Helga continued as president, uncontested, for the next six years.

Incorporation, the next noteworthy event in this organization's life span, brought about fundamental changes in the way Guardians conducted business and accelerated its evolution from an informal group to a formal organization. Group members had sought incorporation as a means to broaden membership and expand resource pools. Agreement to incorporate, according to Frances, introduced changes that included new members, a committee structure, a public meeting place, and formal processes and policy decisions (see appendices). As the number of meetings increased to approve bylaws, Gertrude, a Guardians board member, proposed adoption of formal parliamentary procedure via *Robert's Rules of Order*. Institution of this formal meeting process shifted the nature of their consensual agreements based on friendships to formalized rules and procedures. Members were vested in systematic order and formalized decision-making as a democratic base of operation, rather than a linear form of control. While money had never been an issue in the past, how and when money was to be spent became a matter of documented record with state-reporting mandates. As incorporation was formally proceeding, a series of significant events occurred that led to the conflict reported in this study.

First, Rachel appeared during the summer of incorporation and promised a large sum of money (\$1,700) to Guardians. Rachel's workplace considered Guardians to be a worthy recipient of their annual charity drive for young people, the elderly and animals. They wanted to expand their usual donation to animal shelters by contributing funds to a local group responsible for direct care of animals abandoned by college students. When Rachel called Guardians for information to facilitate this donation, she noticed their lack of a web page and decided to create one for them. At that time, calls to

Guardians were serviced through Helga's home telephone and answering machine.

Rachel recounted leaving multiple messages to no avail, until another phone line was added and Frances returned her call.

Unfortunately, telephone control became a source of simmering conflict between members. Once Rachel reached Frances, they talked for hours. Based on this initial contact, Rachel thought she was going to love the group members and their organization. However, soon after attending her first Guardians' meeting, Rachel reported that the fun organization suddenly turned extremely business-like, formal and cold. She described an instant fear of Helga and Gertrude. What Rachel didn't realize is that she had just experienced a growing divisiveness fueled by the contradiction between Guardians' explicit overall mission and the implicit values of some of its individual members. At the meeting's end, Frances and Veronica (another Guardians member) scurried over to Rachel to reassure her that they were working on changes congruent to their organizational mission.

Another significant event related to telephone control occurred during Helga's vacation. In Helga's absence, Gertrude retrieved Guardians' messages. According to Frances, Gertrude reported that Helga's answering machine was overwhelmed with messages she had saved for years and callers were unable to leave messages. Two other members also complained about a hostile Guardians' greeting on Helga's machine. Frances called to listen for herself and heard, "This is Guardians, an all-volunteer organization. If you are calling at an ungodly time of the morning or night, then please hang up and call at a more reasonable time." Horrified at negative representation of their entire organization, Frances lobbied group consent and immediately paid for a new

phone line in Veronica's home, which was retrievable via voice mail from all members' locations. Helga became outraged when she returned from her vacation to discover this unauthorized change. Unable to screen calls for her favorite outreach activity, *Lost and Found*, Helga retaliated by restoring her phone number in the Guardians' newspaper ad. Guardians now had two phone numbers where the public could reach them.

Primary Participants

As this conflict unfolded, most members were silent during formal discussions, yet extremely vocal before and after meetings. Primary members involved in this conflict were Helga, Gertrude, Frances, Rachel, and Zen. Those providing key support included Veronica, Seneca, Ariadne, and Angelina. Members in the Guardians' organization are mostly white women in the age range of 30-78 (Figure 4.1). They are predominately college-educated, with histories of social activism.

Helga, the Guardians' president, is a white, single woman in her 40's. She holds a doctorate in languages and teaches part time at a local private college. She told the group that she didn't actually want to be president, while at the same time, told one member that she just didn't think anyone else could possibly do it. Rachel described Helga as the "proverbial librarian who goes shhhhhhhhhhhhh."

Gertrude, a Guardians board member and apparent ally to Helga, is a married, white woman in her 60's, with a life long dedication to democratic social processes, town meetings, and animal advocacy. A professor with a doctorate in the sciences, she is known for her attention to detail and her experience with *Robert's Rules of Order*. Helga frequently defers to Gertrude for parliamentary procedures, although no such position exists in the organization. Helga's actions prompted Rachel to ask Frances,

Critical Characters

Relationship Web

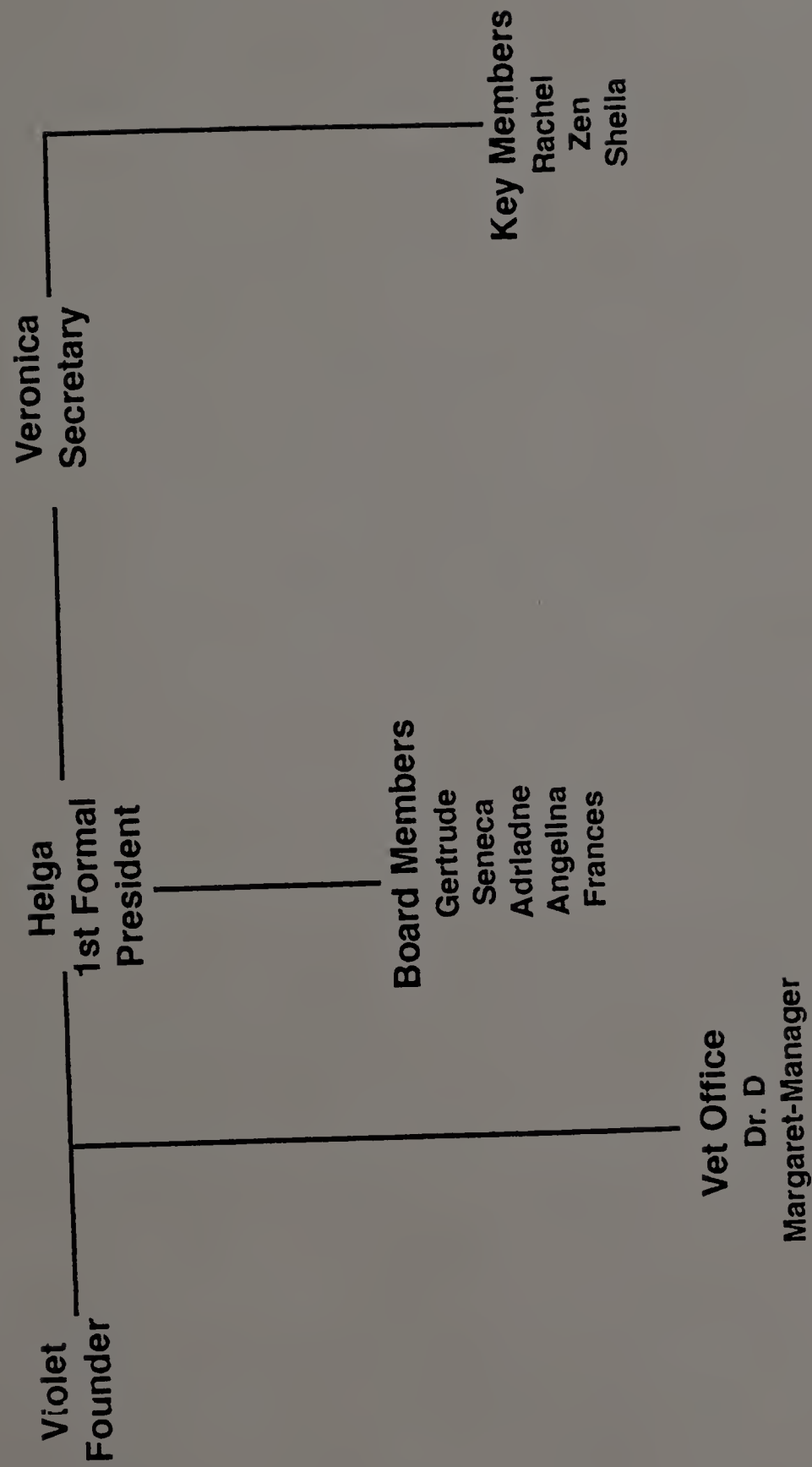


Figure 1. Critical Characters – Relationship Web

“Who designated Gertrude *Robert’s Rules of Order* Queen?” Gertrude and Seneca both attend town meetings and considered themselves friends until they fell on opposite sides in this organizational conflict.

Seneca is a 72-year-old, Jewish, lesbian, feminist with a 4-year college degree and living on a fixed retirement income. She is a vegan who has spent years dedicated to Jewish civil service and animal advocacy at the national level. She appreciates antiques, maintains a booth at an antique consignment shop, and donates profits to Guardians. Frances described both Seneca and Ariadne, another older member, as the “spiritual leaders” of the group.

Ariadne is a sunny, 78-year-old, widowed, white woman with a college degree who lives alone in her own condominium on a fixed retirement income. She, too, is a vegan and committed to animal rights and Central American issues. She is a member of Amnesty International, the League of Women Voters, and the Alternatives to Violence Program. She facilitates Alternatives to Violence workshops for prisoners and actively protests against the wearing of furs.

Frances is a 52 year-old white, single woman with both a nursing and a law degree who has spent fifteen years as director of a human service organization. She is now a self-employed landlord of several single-family residences and business offices. A vegetarian, she frequently provides foster care for cats awaiting adoption and has permanently taken in eleven homeless cats. Dedicated to the group’s survival, Frances often rises to the occasion with her own personal money to bail out Guardians. For example, she spends \$30 a month to support the second phone line and donated \$2,000 to cover unpaid veterinarian bills.

Rachel describes herself as a "Gen-Xer" who "grew up on computers." She is a high-energy, ivy-league-college-educated, pagan-identified, white professional in the computer field who loves a good cause. Rachel's long, bright red hair matches her passionate, expressive communicative style. She has spent many years volunteering in nonprofit organizations, can easily take a stand on issues, and is quite resourceful in accomplishing a mission.

Zen works with Rachel, identifies as a pagan, and entertains many of the same interests. A white, college-educated, single male in his 30's, he is extremely comfortable with abstract concepts and technology of any sort. While he cares about the mission of Guardians, he only joined to support Rachel.

Veronica, a working class, married, white woman, new to the world of animal advocacy, was unemployed during most of this study. She is a few courses shy of obtaining her 4-year college degree but hesitates to put herself through the ordeal of math. She befriended Frances upon meeting her in a store, provided a home for a dog Frances could not keep and, after learning about Guardians, dove in full force to rescue and place cats. When Guardians incorporated, Veronica reluctantly volunteered to serve as secretary, not aware of the enormous spotlight and rigors this role would entail.

Angelina is a married, college-educated, white woman, in her 30's, that, amazingly, carts along one baby, one toddler, and a collection of toys to each meeting. She works part time as a hygienist and is married to an attorney. A Guardians board member and Frances' sister, she boasts a long commitment to animal advocacy and vegetarianism.

Meetings 1-2-3

Since the purpose of this study is to capture the everyday experience of organizational conflict, I taped and transcribed a series of Guardians meetings, each lasting about three hours. From these, I selected a sequence of three meetings that portrayed one conflict-rich package of complex dynamics. Meeting #1 (M1) is a committee meeting in which the overall conflict begins to bubble. Meeting #2 (M2) is the first election cycle of the annual membership meeting as a corporation, wherein conflict peaks and fractures the group. Meeting #3 (M3) is a board meeting held soon after M2, wherein the group reels in repercussions of conflict and reorganization. In this section, I will briefly portray the conflict over the course of these three meetings (M1, M2, and M3) (Figure 4.2).

In meeting #1 (M1), the foster/adoption committee came together to address foster care. Frances added two items to the agenda: IRS compliance in preparation for the group's 501©3 application and a request to discuss the note she had just discovered on Guardians' file at VETS [pseudonym for veterinarian office], which suspended all medical care unless approved in advance by Helga. (VETS treats their cats on credit at a discount). The tone of this meeting was confrontational and threatening. Helga attempted to justify her unilateral decision to control group spending while Frances relentlessly brought up such an action's contradiction to the group's mission of eliminating animal suffering. Most group members sat stone cold as Helga and Frances simultaneously provoked each other line by line. Members silently watched the two women wrestle with concepts of regulation versus change, doing more versus doing less, and the ultimate life versus death of their organization. Frances stoically delivered

Critical Events Chain

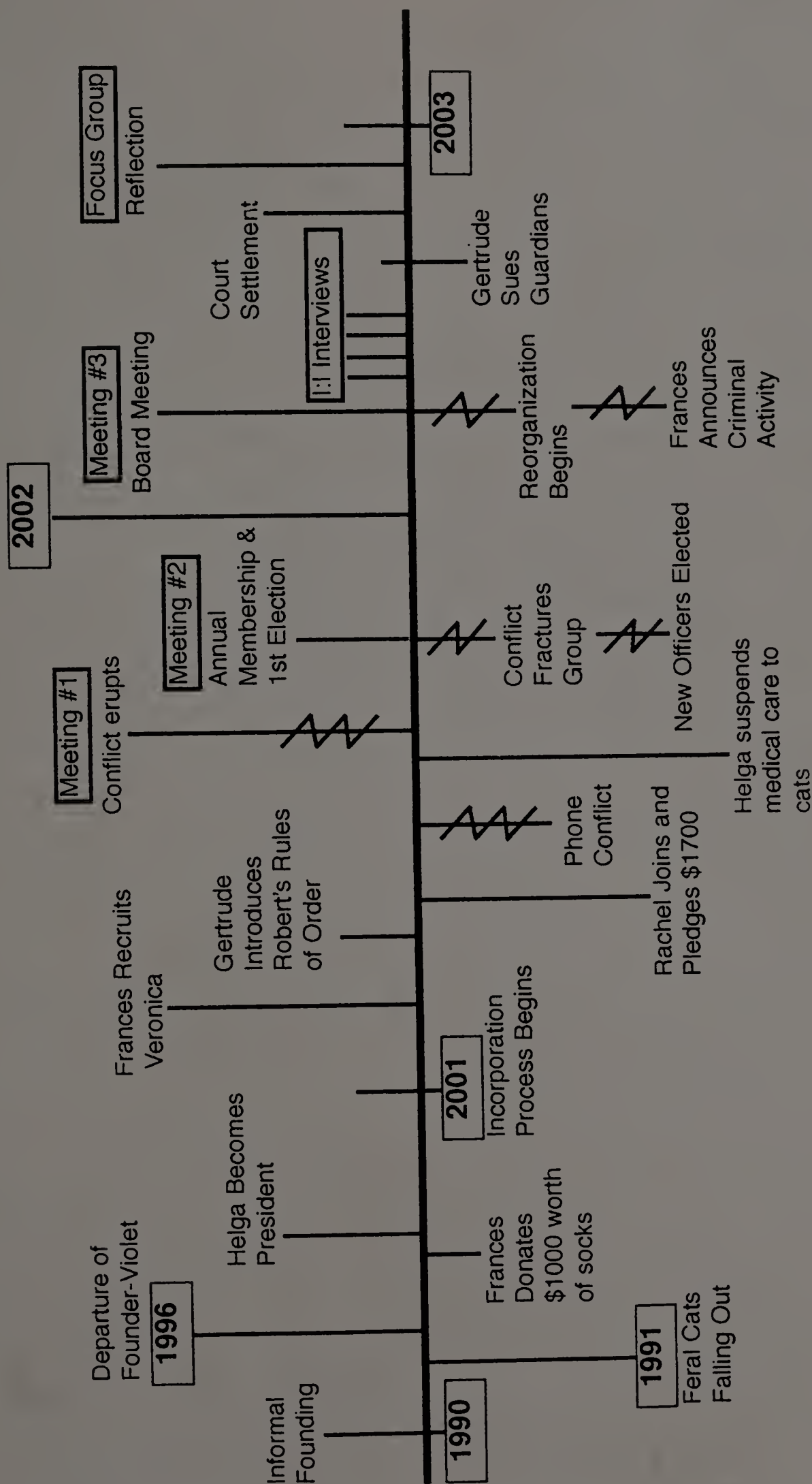


Figure 2. Critical Events Chain

a soliloquy crystallizing her vision of their organizational mission and core function. On the other hand, Helga scolded members for dreaming beyond their means and relentlessly defended her resolution as a result of the crippling rise in their veterinarian expenses.

Although meeting #2 (M2) seemed much more bureaucratic and orderly, an inherent tension bubbled under the surface. This was the first official annual meeting under incorporation in which the formal election of officers and board members was held. In spite of a constraining *Robert's Rules of Order* process, a novel *point of order* competition developed that pitted the dynamic duo of Rachel and Zen against Helga and Gertrude. This disturbance aroused the grand resignation of Helga, the faltering departure of Gertrude, and a phoenix-like liberation of the organization. In its first democratic election since incorporation, members elected four new officers, toppling Helga from her presidency and Gertrude from the Board. Within this one meeting (M2), the organizational climate dramatically shifted from arctic silence to the bubbly exuberance of a lion-hearted takeover.

Meeting #3 (M3) was an emergency board meeting in which the newly elected officers sought a new order of business. While the general mood was informal and collegial, difficult issues of corruption and ethics surfaced. Frances announced criminal activity in a misappropriation of funds authorized by Helga. A conceptual dialogue ensued between Frances and Zen over how to handle this infraction, while the new Board struggled to chart a future direction for Guardians.

Key Participant Interviews

As stated earlier, this study did not rely on structured interviews; it followed a protocol of reflective questions resembling friendly conversations with key participants who revealed behind-the-scenes activities and offered more depth and meaning to the organization's conflict-rich events. Three meetings unfolded a conflict-rich story line colored with performances that hinted at the details of plotting and planning activities before and after meetings. In order to understand the key issues underlying these conflicts, I sought out key members implicated in the meetings' conflicts. In what follows, I reference meetings with the designation of (M1), (M2), (M3) and tag interviews by (I-"participant name"), for example, (I-Veronica). Interviews were conducted with Frances, Rachel, Seneca and Ariadne. Rachel spoke on behalf of Zen, Angelina and Veronica were not easily accessible, and Helga did not return my phone call requesting an interview to "tell her side." Gertrude sued the organization for unpaid foster care bills, so I decided not to approach her.

Of all four interviews, Rachel's was the most revealing tale of behind-the-scenes activities not previously evident in the public interactions of meetings. She described a tremendous interdependent web that seized power from the unsuspecting Helga and Gertrude by way of a covert, collaborative effort among Rachel, Frances, Veronica, and Zen. Rachel was the driving force to create the change that other members desired but could not execute.

In tandem with this shared sense of purpose, Frances' interview resonated deep commitment to the larger cause of this organization. She provided a vision to sustain Guardians over the course of a very difficult year. Frances described her diligence in

exposing contradictions that detracted from their mission and clearly characterized her role as doing whatever it took to rescue Guardians from what she felt were the tyrannical clutches of its leadership.

Influenced by Frances' unwavering resolve, both Seneca and Ariadne expressed profound trust and staunch loyalty to whatever Frances pursued in the name of animals. Both in their seventies, they expressed limits on their own capacities to actively contribute to Guardians' objectives, but they never missed a meeting.

At the conclusion of the interviews, I met once more with participants to discuss findings and probe further into the unspoken undercurrents of social identity. I conducted this conversation in a focus group format with Ariadne, Rachel, Frances and Veronica. While these participants were quite talkative, they did not openly elaborate on the influence of social identity in their conflict. However, the transcribed text reveals prevalent gender styles and white, middle class norms. At the same time, different social identities such as class, education, religion, and sexual orientation are avoided. I will designate responses from this focus group by (FG). The next section of this study frames the meeting, interview and focus group data thematically to address three core research questions.

Constellation of Themes: Question #1

This study is motivated by the overall inquiry, "What is the role of conflict in this organization?"

Conflict Emphasizes Significant Differences and Reveals Underlying Ideology

Seneca links their group's conflict to ideological differences between members.

(I-Seneca)

The person who was the head of the group [Helga] wore a fur coat and that just doesn't work in a group that cares about animals. Why wear a fur of a fox and not a cat or a dog? It really doesn't make a difference.

Actually, Seneca has no problem with members who might wear furs because she understands people are on a continuum of awareness at different points at different times. However, she believes the president represents the entire group and should not wear fur when leading an animal welfare organization—it is a blatant contradiction of values.

(I-Seneca)

It's not a lot of fun to care about animals. The founder of a national animal rights organization said there's one person who made your life miserable and you'll never be the same again. That's the person who raised your consciousness about the suffering of animals. Once you know, you give up a piece of you. There's no way you can unlearn what you know. It's like at a Jewish wedding when the groom steps on the glass—symbolizing, even during our chief joy we will not forget the destruction of Jerusalem. But we have each other, all of the people in the animal rights movement.

Most group members share the common concern for animals in general, and cats, in particular. Vegetarianism is the larger picture of what they represent. Seneca's explanation is that Guardians works in the microcosm and some of its members work in the larger macrocosm of animal rights, raising people's awareness that animals do not exist for people—they have their own intrinsic value. She firmly believes animals should not be eaten or exploited in any way for entertainment, clothes or food. While such activities were necessary at one time in society, they are not now.

Frances agrees with Seneca that the majority of the group values animals and believes they should not be left to suffer. She, too, points to the president's insult of wearing fur at Guardians-sponsored events. When challenged by members, Helga snapped, "That's nonsense. I got this fur coat at a second-hand shop. No animals suffered because of it." Members could not convince Helga that role modeling was part of her leadership function.

Rachel is comfortable with group differences, from the debate on indoor cats versus outdoor cats (Guardians' cats are not allowed outdoors), to how meetings should be run, and how decisions should be made. In fact, although she carries a leather pocketbook, she does not bring it into meetings out of respect to animal activists. She thinks Helga and Gertrude had no respect for beliefs of other members, and treated views different from theirs as worthless and stupid. Members share the common goal of helping animals while each member may have very different ideas about how that is achieved.

(I-Rachel)

Seneca may not like the way I do some things. She may not like the fact I have a leather handbag or that I eat meat. But she isn't going to take that up with me. She's going to say to me, "Do you understand what you're doing?" And I'm perfectly well aware of what I'm doing. I will listen to her educate me but she isn't going to try to change me. She's going to give me the information and let me make my own decisions.

Rachel had no qualms remarking, "Now that's interesting. I don't agree with you on that. This is my take." In Rachel's view, parties were unable to express differences positively. As these unresolved differences grew more entrenched, people chose sides and conflict spiraled out of control.

Conflict Clarifies Organizational Identity and Redefines Mission

Frances believes that incorporation, and all its trappings, triggered the conflict and shifted control from a single individual with a “switchboard” to a participatory organization with elected officers and directors. In her words, “from a dictatorship to a democracy—a shared power base.” In her view, the big turning point came when Helga cut off all medical care at a time when Guardians had just taken in eleven kittens with respiratory illnesses. When members begged for her reasons, Helga shouted back, “You people just don’t listen.” As soon as medical care was cut off by Helga, phone calls among members escalated because people found the action so atrocious and nobody understood it. Instead of exploring options with the group—such as taking a line of credit from the bank—Helga just cut off spending, which meant these kittens would suffer and possibly die. Members were pressured to pay out of their own pockets for medical care if they wanted to save them.

(M1)

HELGA: We can’t keep running the bill up and not paying it. I can’t say it any more bluntly.

FRANCES: Alright, but Veronica’s question is, “What will we do when we come upon an animal we would ordinarily help that needs medical care?”

HELGA: One of you people put it on a charge card.

FRANCES: So you would want a member of our committee to pay for it personally?

HELGA: That’s what I would do, I would put it on my card.

Frances also thinks the conflict escalated as control shifted, in other words, as control slipped away from Helga. As meetings became more frequent, membership

increased and Helga did not like that. Helga wanted the organization to remain small while Frances wanted it to grow.

(I-Frances)

If you want to help animals, you help more and more and more. Get more members, help more animals, get more money, and get more animals helped. That Guardians should remain small was just very bizarre—no corporation says that—that we should remain small. There was no vision. She had no vision, no leadership ability and it just became more and more apparent.

Frances was delighted to recruit members to help animals. As Helga fought to maintain control, Frances fought on behalf of the organization's mission. She was clear people were coming together for one reason—the animals.

(I-Frances)

It's the only thing we were there for. This is what brought us together—animals. That's why people are coming out on a rainy night—because they want to help the animals. Not because they want to have a fight with somebody or lead a conflict.

At the adoption/foster committee meeting (M1), Frances failed to uncover details surrounding Helga's decision to cut off medical care. But she did manage to arouse a sense of who they are and what they are about:

(M1)

We have an emergency now so we have to focus, to prioritize what we need to do. Cats are suffering because we are not taking them in. We get donations because we get cats off the streets and stop cats from suffering. Otherwise, it's best if we just say, "Look, community, you think we are helping cats, don't rely on us because we are not helping the cats." That's what they need to know.

As far as Frances is concerned, Guardians was granted nonprofit status by the State and with that comes a commitment to citizens and taxpayers. It also means they can never suspend their mission because tax relief is given to those who donate to their

organization. The State would not give them 501©3 status if government officials thought someone had unilateral power to cut off care to cats. This status is granted because there is a need and their organization is doing something to benefit the community. Guardians has to carry out its mission—it is no longer optional. If a cat is dying because medical care is cut off, that is a drastic thing.

But Helga disagrees:

(M1)

HELGA: It is not a drastic thing. It's not a drastic thing.

FRANCES: It is a drastic thing if a cat is dying because we are not caring for them, it's a drastic thing.

HELGA: Let the SPCA do it.

FRANCES: Let them do what?

HELGA: Let the SPCA do it.

FRANCES: Do what?

HELGA: Because we can't do everything.

FRANCES: But neither can they.

HELGA: We do what we can.

FRANCES: But I think we can do more.

HELGA: I am really sick of this. We can do more if the organization were stronger.

FRANCES: Well no, the first thing we can do that's more is to see how serious this issue is before we cut off care to cats.

HELGA: If you want to take the risk, then go ahead, and if we are cut off by VETS then we are in big trouble.

This conflict forced members to clarify what they care about and how they wanted to express this. If they are going to defend their mission, they have to be clear on who they are. This conflict provided an opportunity to galvanize their organizational identity and redefine their mission.

Conflict Surfaces Contradictions in Organizational Mission

Initially, disturbances within this organization seemed quite small and petty to me, yet throughout meetings and interviews, I observed a dire concern over survival of the organization. Members took a hard look at what mattered to them and what they could do about it. Conflict clarified their identity, redefined their mission, and strengthened their resolve to preserve what they believed in. If they wanted their organization to survive, they had to make changes that would not be easy. When Helga cut off medical care to cats, members collectively committed to changes that would help preserve an organizational identity and a mission that mattered to them.

In opposition to the popular understanding of Guardians' explicit mission, to care for cats, *Roberts' Rules of Order* had become an instrument of control. The membership was stunned at Helga's unexpected shift in leadership, and while they were not opposed to rules and procedures, they were opposed to a unilateral mode of control that ultimately undercut what mattered to them. Members could handle the organizational climate shift from informal to formal and from visionary leadership to presidency, yet they were unprepared for the shift from group consensus to hierarchical control, and from warm and fuzzy to cold and chilling.

Framing the conflict in terms of life and death for Guardians, Helga accused its members of “endangering the existence of the organization for having such a high medical bill with the veterinarian,” while giving herself credit for “a decision that was made so that this organization doesn’t go under” (M1). She extended this threat to,

We are endangering our relationship with the vet. If he says, ‘OK this is it. You guys have run up the bill. You can’t pay it. This is it. You’re completely cut off,’ and we are in legal trouble, I am not going to take the chance of having that happen. I’ve been talking to Margaret [office manager at VETS], who is certainly the representative of VETS and knows what our bill is. She and I made the decision. You guys are not getting the idea that you have to get the bill down, so we have to do it that way. (M1)

Here, Helga used perceived threats to substantiate her actions.

After many probes throughout the meeting (M1), Frances challenged Helga’s senseless threats, “It would be a great leap for me to understand, from that conversation, that our animals could not go there for medical care, because that wasn’t said. And Dr. B [veterinarian at VETS] does not even know about this, does he?” Helga stuck with the threat, “Again, I need to emphasize that we will lose good will. We have to respect that relationship. We should not abuse the good will they have shown us. I’m not going to sit here and watch the bill go up and up!” (M1)

Next, Frances exposed the flaw in Helga’s leadership,

So, really, the crisis situation is that there are no funds coming in. How are you addressing that crisis situation besides cutting off care to animals? Honestly, what else is going on so that we can have a sense that we’re all working on this issue?

Helga avoided her question, so Frances tried again, “Well, what are you doing?” Helga still did not answer, so Frances asked another way, “Whose responsibility is it to see that the organization raises money?” Helga retorted, “It’s everyone’s responsibility.”

Frances tried again, "All right, but do you see your role as the leader of the group to initiate things and to see this as an emergency and to call an emergency meeting?" (M1)

As hard as Frances tried, she could not get Helga to assume the principled leadership role the group wanted. As the meeting progressed, Frances lobbied for her version of the organizational identity and mission in glaring contradiction to Helga's actions, which made it easier and easier for members to choose sides and chart a new direction.

The data generated by the first research question shows that conflict serves to emphasize significant differences within this organization revealing an underlying ideology of its members. Seeking clarification of their greater organizational identity, they bump into contradictions and struggle to redefine their mission.

Constellation of Themes: Question #2

The second research question asks, "What is the relationship of conflict to the social self and the organizational structure?"

The Organizational Structure Serves to Reinforce Unilateral Power and Control, Silence Members, and Suppress Differences

With incorporation, came formal meetings and the adoption of *Robert's Rules of Order* as a meeting process structure. Not all members were happy about this. Frances reflected on the change:

(I-Frances)

I never used *Robert's Rules of Order* before in my life. Never. I'd heard of *Roberts Rules*. Never used them in my life. But once the conflict started, Helga and Gertrude started using *Roberts Rules* against the group.

Robert's Rules of Order is not required for a nonprofit organization to incorporate. The only legal mandate is to prepare yearly paperwork for the Secretary of State and to meet at least once a year and elect officers; meetings can be conducted in whatever way the membership prefers. Gertrude is comfortable with parliamentary procedures from local town meetings, so she recommended *Robert's Rules of Order* and wrote the 9th edition into the bylaws. Helga routinely deferred to Gertrude when there was a question about procedural process. Helga and Gertrude were hypercritical of the minutes Veronica recorded. Frances gives her impression:

(I-Frances)

They were trying to change the minutes. They were trying to actually re-write history! I happened to have my copy of *Robert's Rules of Order* with me at the meeting, so I looked up the correct procedure and objected to the modification. Helga tried to counter that, and I informed her that it does not go any further according to *Robert's Rules of Order*. She got very childlike and objected to my objection. I was just disgusted and said, "No, let's move on."

While Frances did not like the inflexibility of *Robert's Rules of Order*, she was determined to learn the process because she was uncomfortable with the way it was being used.

Under the formal structure, meetings were cold and unfriendly. As president, Helga controlled permission to talk. Members typically observed in silence as Frances, Helga and Gertrude battled within the rigid format dictated by *Robert's Rules of Order*. Frances pursued lines of inquiry in the manner of careful, conflict-resolution-like statements, such as:

(M1)

Can you tell us a little about that? How it arose? But how did the situation arise? Did Dr. B call us? Did we call him? You talked to the receptionist about the situation? Has Dr. B been advised of this? Have you talked to him about it? All right, so you made this arrangement with Margaret because you thought the bill was getting too high? All right, anything else we need to know about that? OK, let me just restate what Helga has explained as the issue and correct me if I'm wrong.

In total contrast, Helga spoke in a sharp staccato of statements. For example—

(M1)

This is ridiculous.

I think we're damn lucky that we are not charged interest.

I KNOW the bill is too high. It is not a question of feeling at all. THE BILL IS TOO HIGH.

THE BILL IS TOO HIGH. It is not a question of too high. It is a FACT and I do not want it open for discussion.

We can't keep running the bill up and not paying for it. I can't say it any more bluntly.

No, no, you guys are not paying the bill. We are endangering the relationship with the vet.

Again, you people just don't listen. We are going round and round.

Don't question what I do.

Robert's Rules of Order provided a meeting structure to shield Helga and reinforce her control over information and interactions. No matter how objectively Frances probed. Helga was insulated by her power differential.

The Same Organizational Structure Provides a Paradox of Power to Challenge Authority

While Helga and Gertrude used the structure of *Robert's Rules of Order* to maximize restrictions and regulations, Frances, Rachel, and Zen used that same process to engineer change. Rachel has strong feelings about *Robert's Rules of Order*.

(I-Rachel)

I hate *Robert's Rules of Order*! I really hate them. I don't think they are a very good way to make a group work together. There has to be some better way. The only time you want to resort to *Robert's Rules of Order* is where you are working with your enemies. They all have their own agenda and they all have their own reasons for being there. And it's all about stabbing each other in the back and getting what you want in the end. That's what *Robert's Rules of Order* are for! It really worked in that meeting. It did! We took *Robert's Rules of Order*—and we said OK, if you want to play by *Robert's Rules of Order*—fine, we'll play. And we were lucky to have Zen.

Zen had studied *Robert's Rules of Order* throughout his tenure with past nonprofit organizations, so he knew the loopholes and how to manipulate the process. Rachel, Zen, and Frances decided to use *Robert's Rules of Order* during the annual meeting (M2) to switch the agenda as soon as the floor could be taken, so that elections came before annual committee reports. This action would ensure immediate voting and a new president. The outgoing president (Helga) would no longer command the floor and a new organizational chart would be in place.

Rachel, Frances, and Veronica divided up the list of members they could trust and made calls to inform them of their plan. They wanted allies who would not mistakenly interfere with their well-laid plot. Also, the group decided that Rachel was the best person to raise the motion to switch the agenda and Zen would second her move. As Rachel reflects on what transpired, she explains it was the best way to work within the rules to get what they wanted. Soon after the annual meeting started, the Rachel-Zen team executed a stunning *Robert's Rules of Order* performance.

(M2)

RACHEL: I'd like to make a motion at this point, if you don't mind me interrupting you, Frances. Uh, I move to suspend the rules that interfere with the introduction of the elections at this time in order to get that over.

GERTRUDE: Point of order. Uh, we cannot do the elections before we do the reports because if we do the elections first the reports....

RACHEL: Uh, point of order.

GERTRUDE: will no longer count.

RACHEL: Point of...

GERTRUDE: I'm, I'm not finished yet. Uh, if, if we don't get our, uh, reports in then, uh, after the elections whatever, whatever reports there were, uh, are not any longer valid to be put into the record.

RACHEL: Point of order. As a matter of fact, let me call my point of order. The motion that I just made is non-debatable. So, her point of order against my motion is actually, it's not valid because she's, we're not allowed to debate according to *Robert's Rules of Order*, Chapter 11, Section 40. There is not...

GERTRUDE: POINT OF ORDER. POINT OF ORDER. YOU'RE ALWAYS IN ORDER.

ZEN: Point of order. According to your bylaws, it states that the, uh, departments do not get re-elected to the next board meeting after the election. So the chairs of these..uh..

RACHEL: committees

ZEN: committees, thank you, are still valid after the elections. It is only the officers which get re-elected.

GERTRUDE: Point of order. Uh, WHEN the elections are held, ALL PENDING ITEMS fall from the floor. They are finished.

RACHEL: I think that there's a motion on the floor for us to vote on at this point.

HELGA: It's an invalid motion though.

RACHEL: I don't believe it is and I believe that the...

HELGA: Well I...

RACHEL: That we have a right to vote.

HELGA: I am deferring to Gertrude's knowledge of Robert's Rules of Order. She is VERY familiar with it and she has been in groups a LONG time and knows a LOT better than any of us.

ZEN: I'd like to...

HELGA: And just to...

ZEN: I'd like to appeal the decision of the chair which is, I believe, a-ah, ah, motion that she is the executive...

HELGA: Who's the chair?

ZEN: You are the chair.

HELGA: I'm the President.

ZEN: You are the President, which means by default you are the chair.

RACHEL: Per *Robert's Rules of Order*.

ZEN: Per *Robert's Rules of Order*. And I would like to appeal the decision to postpone that vote which means that the decision made by the chair, the executive, which I duly accepted, is before the membership to decide.

RACHEL: I second that.

Silence

ZEN: I do believe that as the chair, you have to call a vote on this.

HELGA: What is the purpose of doing this?

RACHEL: There's no...

HELGA: The purpose of holding the elections?

FRANCES: There's no discussion.

RACHEL: There's no discussion. I don't have to state my purpose. There is no discussion on this motion.

HELGA: Well. If this is the way this is going to proceed, then I am not going to participate in this.

RACHEL: I don't understand how you not follow *Robert's Rules of Order*. I made a motion according to the rules.

HELGA: I am disagreeing with your knowledge of the rules.

ZEN: I appealed that motion which by *Robert's Rules* forced, which means you have to bring it to the membership to decide.

Just at break point, Helga startled members with a grand resignation—before she could be voted out. She appeared ready for a final stand off, by thrusting copies of an annual report and a resignation letter onto the table. Slowly and deliberately, she pulled bright red, leather gloves over her hands, swirled her back to the crowd, and departed.

(M2)

HELGA: Alright, I'm not going to participate in this. I'm leaving copies of the financial report that you can look at. These are things for whoever is here to deal with. I have had JUST ABOUT ENOUGH of the behavior of this group. Um...

RACHEL: Well...

HELGA: I have the report of the president here, which someone can read, whoever it is. I don't care. I have a financial report and I have a letter of resignation.

SENECA: HELGA, can we...?

HELGA: I am resigning EFFECTIVE IMMEDIATELY as President, as Lost and Found Coordinator, and as a member, because this organization is just not behaving as an organization should. So YOU conduct the meeting as you see fit and leave me out of it.

Meanwhile, Gertrude valiantly tried to steer the sinking ship. She continued to fumble through tattered pages of her *Robert's Rules of Order* paperback book. Frances describes that moment in terms of a funeral. Everyone was deathly quiet and polite as Gertrude desperately searched to no avail for a passage to justify Helga's action. The chilling reign of *Robert's Rules of Order* staggered to a shameful finish.

(M2)

GERTRUDE: I mean, I think that we could work this out. Find out if the procedure is appropriate and, uh, the gentleman there who I don't know....

ZEN: Which do you question, the appeal, the, uh...

GERTRUDE: No, uh, I'm questioning suspending the rule, the orders.

RACHEL: Suspension of the rules was...

ZEN: Which section?

RACHEL: 11-40.

Silence. Zen and Gertrude each stared at individual copies of *Robert's Rules*.

RACHEL: Do you have it there? Page 658.

GERTRUDE: Oh, thank you.

ZEN: To take up a motion of its proper order, for example, to introduce an item of new business before that item was reached, the member who has obtained the floor can say, I move to suspend the rule that you continue the introduction at this time of.... If unanimous consent is given or the motion is adopted by a two-thirds vote, the member is immediately recognized to introduce the resolution. Now it goes on further, later, to say that, since this is a suspension of the rules, it is non-debatable and non-amendable.

Silence.

GERTRUDE: The point of order is always in order, so...

RACHEL: Yes.

ZEN: Yes, I know, the point of order is perfectly...

GERTRUDE: So that point of order is virtually all right.

ZEN: But so is my appeal, uh...

GERTRUDE: So, so that point blurred.

RACHEL: OK.

GERTRUDE: Sorry that you thought that it was not appropriate, for the point of order is always appropriate.

Silence.

ZEN: I do believe the point of order has not been backed up, uh. You said that all appropriate business is tabled but you haven't. You actually cited in your reference to that not seeing that in *Robert's Rules*.

GERTRUDE: Well then we, you know, we could have been finished with all five reports in this time. Now if you don't mind, I'LL TAKE TIME TO LOOK UP THAT. And you'll have to wait while I do it. OK. I'll look it up about, uh, about the, uh, items that will no longer be part of this meeting as a result of being denied. And the reports that have been prepared, including perhaps, the tax-exempt application report, uh, will not be turned in.

Silence.

GERTRUDE: This is going to take time because I wasn't anticipating that we would not allow 30 minutes, or so, on reports.

Silence.

ZEN: I do believe, uh, the point of order side, the motion, is still put before the membership and the chair did not move that towards the membership to force a decision which HAS to be put to the membership. I can cite the *Robert's Rules of Order* for that as well. At this point, I believe, it is the membership's decision to decide this.

Silence.

ZEN: Unless you don't want to hear from the membership.

GERTRUDE: I would like to find the citation that says that.

ZEN: Yes.

GERTRUDE: Following proceedings.

RACHEL: Says here that the chair can call for the membership.

ZEN: In the bylaws, there is provision in *Robert's Rules of Order* for providing a chairman, it's not provided in the bylaws, but is there a provision in the bylaws?

RACHEL: There's no provision in the bylaws.

ZEN: There is no provision in the bylaws, can you find it?

GERTRUDE: The secretary is the presiding officer in the absence of a president and a vice president. Someone has to do the secretary's job.

Silence.

Long silence.

GERTRUDE: I'm not going to continue looking. I think it's a waste of time and like I said, we could have done the reports in less time. I'll turn in the reports that I have. And, uh, at this point, this is all one report and these are other reports. I'm not interested, either, in continuing or attending the meeting. I don't feel a good purpose to be served. I came partly to give reports and I'm not going to have the opportunity to give them now. I'd rather not remain. Um, I do have some messages to give out.

RACHEL: At this time we need to call a vote on the motion.

VERONICA: OK. I'd like to call a vote on the motion. Would you restate the motion?

RACHEL: I move to suspend the rules that interfere with the introduction at this time of the election.

FRANCES: Do we need record of it?

RACHEL: No.

VERONICA: All those in favor?

MAJORITY: Aye. Aye.

VERONICA: All those opposed?

FRANCES: None.

VERONICA: All right, Seneca, the voting can go on.

Gertrude seemed determined to not cave in to the surprise turn of events.

However, the very same routine that had once worked in her favor now worked to the advantage of the opposition. Gertrude clung on as long as she could to her calm demeanor to compose herself for a departure. But, the failure of *Robert's Rules of*

Order paradoxically shifted the balance of power, and an organization that placed so much emphasis on conducting business by the book, turned itself around “by the book.”

Contradictions Between Explicit Organizational Mission and Implicit Individual Values Provoke Conflict

Most members in Guardians appeared implicitly to expect organizational processes (ways of doing business) to be congruent with the overall mission. Dedicated to the welfare of animals, they assumed their members would have the same regard for human beings. To such an organization, how they do things is just as important as what they do. However, treatment of each other and consideration for people and animals played out quite differently between members. For example, Frances questioned Helga's capacity for compassion:

(I-Frances)

Sometimes Helga would get mad at people for being on welfare and make comments like, “Those people are probably just welfare mothers looking for handouts.” I think she screened a lot of the calls in this way. They may have questioned the donation of \$50 and asked if it could be lowered. For that reason she wouldn't give them cats. Generally, if someone couldn't pay \$50, we'd waive it. With incorporation, we've changed our bylaws so that it's a donation that can be paid in volunteer time (instead of dollars).

Helga's patterns seemed to reproduce.

(I-Frances)

She never had a generous comment for anybody in the group. She never rewarded people publicly in a meeting for what they had done. Whether it was raising a little money or helping animals, she never concerned herself with what was going on. She never knew! She never praised anybody. Just sort of like scolded people because enough money wasn't coming in. And people didn't like that. Who wants that? Volunteer your time to go sit before someone who's going to yell at you? And tell you that you're not doing your job that you're not getting paid for?

On a larger scale, Helga was flunking *Leadership 101*. Seneca gave a revealing view of Helga and Gertrude's leadership style:

(I-Seneca)

The people who had been running the organization were doing it in a very undemocratic way and not in a way that would attract anyone else to get involved. From my own group experience, what you've got to do is make people generals. Let people feel that they are important, that they are needed, that there are important things to do and there are practical decision-making processes to carry out things. A decision-making process is very important to those involved. And this just didn't happen. Decisions had been made already. The meetings, the board meetings would just go on and on and on.

As a new member, Rachel made the mistake of thinking feedback might be welcome:

(I-Rachel)

The second meeting that I was at I basically piped in the middle and said, "Excuse me." I raised my hand and Helga acknowledged me. I said, "I'm sorry, as a new member of this organization, I want to let you know that you're not giving a very good impression of yourself to new members. You really make me feel unwelcome and uncomfortable and I believe that this conversation needs to be taken off line between Helga and Frances because the conversation—I'm listening to the two of you state the same points over and over again. Frances is saying that she did not mean to step on Helga's toes and she was just trying to get something done and Helga is saying that she feels hurt by that. That's a personal conflict between two people that should not be brought up here. We're all aware of it. You two need to work this out outside the meeting."

At that moment, no one said anything. However, in Rachel's words, "Frances and Veronica went, Bing! We can work with her!" The similar business styles of like-minded members made the work easier for them.

While incorporation opened up elections to members and instituted a democratic meeting structure, to Helga, it was an opportunity to rule over a new entity. However,

their new bylaws restricted offices, including the presidency, to four consecutive terms. Still, Gertrude announced to the nominating committee, "I want Helga to be president. I think she deserves to be president for the first year of incorporation." Seneca remarked, "We're going to have a democratic election, and it doesn't matter who anybody wants. It's who the group wants." Gertrude was very upset at that.

After elections, the hope for new procedural processes was immediately evident and the floodgates of expression burst open.

(I-Rachel)

After we went through the elections, everything changed in that same meeting. People, who never said a thing in the meeting, all of a sudden, could talk. People were allowed to voice their opinions; they realized that whatever they said was not going to be viewed as a joke. They could have fun. The tension, the release of that pressure was incredible. I think at that point, for me, was what really made it all worthwhile because up until that point, I was still scared this thing was going to blow up in our faces, and people were going to be mad at me or blame me. I didn't even know what would happen. That there was this anticipation of danger—'gaaasssp—what's going to happen to me?'

Frances does not consider herself an animal activist or a demonstrator, but someone who is definitely concerned with animal rights and animal welfare. A seven-year member of Guardians, her past experience garnered her election to treasurer in the first election. She takes in kittens and cats, and trained Veronica to trap lost pets, do home visits, and screen adoption calls. Because she has a law degree, Frances is sought after by the membership for legal advice. Now, she devotes most of her volunteer time to administrative, legal and financial issues, especially making sure that Guardians follows mandates of incorporation—recording minutes, holding meetings, and giving proper notice.

In the time between the annual meeting (M2) and the following Board meeting (M3), Frances cross-checked the organization's bookkeeping. Before this review, Helga had controlled finances exclusively and she relinquished the checkbook to Frances only after her resignation at the annual meeting, five months after the incorporation date. At a later meeting, Frances delivered a report on the financial state of the organization:

(M3)

FRANCES: Now, the part that's important here is where I've tallied everything. With this in mind, Helga commented a number of times that the kittens were killing the program, that the kittens we brought in were a burden, that there was no income, that we were to stop bringing in kittens because we couldn't afford them.

VERONICA: Specifically cats brought in by individuals.

FRANCES: Specifically the cats in the litter of eleven that needed to be tested because one of the mothers had died. When those kittens came in, our income was \$1,710, and our expenses including tests on those kittens was \$1,276. So there was a gain in the Guardians account in that period of \$433. So we did not lose money on those kittens.

This was incredible new information. She continued with her report.

FRANCES: Records show reimbursement of \$87 to Gertrude for a hand written bill for food and foster care costs during this same period.

VERONICA: For something Guardians never agreed to pay for?

FRANCES: Right.

VERONICA: From the beginning.

FRANCES: Right.

Everyone talked at once over each other.

VERONICA: Why did she get such a contract and no one else did?

FRANCES: Ha, ha, exactly.

RACHEL: That's what we're trying to figure out—did Helga just make up a contract, give it to Gertrude and not pass it on to anybody else?

FRANCES: Now, attached to her bill is a list of medications and a bill to another veterinarian during the same time our....

VERONICA: After she cut us off from VETS!

FRANCES: That's when we were cut off. She not only wrote a check to Gertrude, but also paid herself \$83 for her own foster cat.

For the past five years, Frances was the only one to draft foster care contracts, so how would Gertrude obtain one with no one else's knowledge or consent? Frances was heating up to a bigger revelation. She continued:

VERONICA: She wrote a check to VETS for \$20.

FRANCES: Well that's the issue I want to go over right now. On September 19th, Helga was directed by the Board to stop advertising immediately (the next day) and to pay down whatever was in the account to Dr. B (VETS). On that day, we had \$405 in the bank and she left the meeting with \$315 in membership fees that brought our balance up to \$720. Our bill with VETS was exactly \$720. Instead she only paid \$200 to VETS, paid the newspaper \$20 and wrote a check to another foster care provider for \$26 in pills. This is CRIMINAL ACTIVITY because she was directed by the Board to pay this money, which is not hers, to VETS. And we were addressing an emergency situation, we were all cut off, all of our cats were cut off, all of our animals were cut off from vet care unless we paid for it ourselves which is what we did. Which is what we had to do, we had to do that, we were cut off right in the middle with a lot of kittens with upper respiratory disease, which can be a killer. So we went ahead and paid for it ourselves.

VERONICA: And we lost two cats because they could not go.

FRANCES: Because we had no vet to bring them to.

VERONICA: And we had a cat dying from an eye tumor.

RACHEL: While this cat was dying of a tumor—at the same time this was happening.

VERONICA: And he was cut off from VETS.

FRANCES: That's true.

The full impact of Helga's earlier actions sunk in. While her unilateral decision discounted members and hurt cats, Helga's greatest assault to the group was special preference to herself and others during this grave period. While \$300-\$400 in misappropriated funds was not grand larceny, withholding payment to VETS was a serious violation at the heart of their mission—what mattered most to them. Uncovering this information did not bring closure because they also had to decide what to do about it.

Frances worried about her fiscal responsibility as the treasurer—was she duty-bound to report this to the Attorney General? It seemed more important than ever to sever their relationship to the old Guardians by the incorporation date, yet, the blending of funds had continued five months after incorporation. Frances announced she would donate \$2,000 from her own nonprofit corporation to balance their account and cover the foster cats until responsibility was determined. Zen decided to offer his thoughts, but Frances wasn't convinced:

(M3)

ZEN: We were, in effect, sharing a bank account with this private organization [Helga's] and funds were misappropriated towards caring of cats that were in the system prior to incorporation. While I'm not saying that what she did was right, the legal argument could be made to say that what she did is not criminal-like which covers our butts so we can still get the nonprofit, tax-exempt status. She was using old Guardians' funds that were still in the same bank account.

FRANCES: It's the secrecy that makes it so...how do you reconcile that other cats were cut off from vet care? Members who were not board members had to pay personal funds to see cats get cared for because we were owed that too.

ZEN: That isn't financial liability—that's the way they conducted business. There was a lot of favoritism.

FRANCES: How do you see the difference? They paid themselves, right?

ZEN: They paid themselves but we can make an argument because it's in our best interest in this case. I hate to say it. It's in our best interest to protect them on this because we stand to lose everything if we don't. Yeah, it should have been done a whole number of ways and yeah, they're sleazy, nasty, little people. The only thing that we need to address is fixing it so that people can't be sleazy, nasty bastards in the future. I think that extends to reviewing the bylaws. We need to look at the bylaws and figure out what went wrong because something went wrong this last year. It was very obvious just coming into this organization—that something was very wrong.

FRANCES: Yes, Helga broke the allegiance.

ZEN: Yes.

FRANCES: And our president had a lack of allegiance that's what I think happened. She did not follow the guidelines for her position.

ZEN: Right.

While quite rational, Zen's approach did not bring comfort. Frances agreed it was important to get this behind the organization. However, she found it difficult to release Helga from these violations:

(M3)

FRANCES: You're all trying to do what's right, but intentional wrongdoing is taking a cat to a vet when they knew that nobody else could take their cats to the vet and get paid for—paid for out of group money. Money that everybody in the group had raised—that's intentional wrongdoing. The rest you could say they were just bickering—at the meetings it was just nit pick and bickering, mean spiritedness. But the intentional wrongdoing is what angers me to no end because when I saw this I said, 'Oh, I just can't believe it,' because she was sneaking around my back, sneaking around everybody's back and it's intentional. So you know she clearly...

VERONICA: She took money out of our pockets where we had paid out of our pockets for vet care in order to get cats adopted.

FRANCES: Yeah, I am able to do that because I've worked twenty years and I don't have children and I've saved some money but if you're dealing with a regular group of volunteers who are maybe younger people starting out—what

would happen? Those cats could not have been treated. They would have been left.

ZEN: So basically we're addressing two things: (1) They were bad—what do we do and (2) they have cats, they were bad, what do we do with the cats? With the first one I think we should probably put together an official "thou shalt—you do or die" type letter, put it in our records and don't even send it—as a matter of public record.

Members continued to wrestle for quite some time over what to do, and found it overwhelming to resolve business matters that had gotten far too personal. They agreed to revisit these topics at their next meeting.

Gender Operates as Both a Social Identity and an Ideology

Within Guardians, multiple social identities reveal themselves in different ways. Foremost, there is an organizational identity of animal welfare ideology explicitly expressed in its mission and firmly rooted in fundamental beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions shared by most members. Not as obvious, a gendered identity is implicitly embedded in contradictory dominant-subordinate processes that trigger conflict. Less visible identities representing religion, class, educational status, sexual orientation, and feminism are left outside of the organization. Highly connected to its ideology and mission, Guardians is segmented in its representation of individual social identities. White, middle class, educated feminist norms dominate the dynamics and other identities—working class, lesbian, and Jewish—are not acknowledged.

(I-Seneca)

Although I'm not religious, I'm a highly identified Jewish lady. I do not want to get into a discussion with anybody here about Israel and Zionism because I'm feeling that there would be some tension there. So, I don't bring that into the group because the way the situation is today. It's a very

complex thing and I don't think the complexities are really thought about by a lot of people.

Guardians is an all-woman organization, with the exception of periods when men join to strategically support women and their issues. For example, Zen joined to help Rachel with *Robert's Rules of Order*, and the partners of Veronica and Gertrude joined to stack the vote, during the first annual election. In a focus group, members expressed a mixture of thoughts on the role of gender:

(FG)

RACHEL: I don't want to say this in the wrong way but these men aren't manly men—

VERONICA: They're not macho. Zen was there for the sport of it. But he is a compassionate animal person.

RACHEL: Oh, he loves cats, and actually Zen would love to do things for Guardians, except that his life is busier than mine. There are a couple of men in my office who have expressed an interest in Guardians, and I am inviting them to our first membership event. Both men are very caring and nurturing people. Bob is gay, and Jim is just like Zen and myself. Pagan. Down to roots. Earth kind of persons. They're not, "go-out and watch-football-types."

VERONICA: They're not apes.

RACHEL: Zen has always said that he has much better friendships with women because when he was growing up, that's who his friends were. He's not dangerous; we don't perceive him as dangerous, so we treat him like any other woman.

ARIADNE: I know several men extremely fond of cats, but I don't know if they want to be involved in the bigger picture. In the vegetarian groups, it's 50-50 and in the animal rights groups it's about 90-10.

FRANCES: Seneca says that we're nurturers, we're caretakers. That's the role of women.

Veronica expanded the explanation of their gender composition to that of affiliation, but it swung back to differences in socialization:

(FG)

VERONICA: We're also a group by association. Zen came in because he knew Rachel. I was Frances' friend and Ariadne knew Frances.

FRANCES: Men don't really hang out together and talk and do things. They might hang out sitting next to each other in a bar or a ball game, but they don't talk.

RACHEL: We're very strong women. We talk over each other. We laugh. We shout. We've got three conversations at the same time. We're a little intimidating to men. Even a man who is very sure will be intimidated of a group of strong women. I can see them going, "This is not for me."

FRANCES: Or I wonder if they would want to take over?

VERONICA: Well, we have a tendency to coffee klatch when we're together. It's not just a board meeting; we're catching up.

FRANCES: Men in our culture aren't brought up to care for animals.

ARIADNE: There's no outreach for men in this group. We don't have any people of color either. I think we're being too stereotypical about men, because in animal rescue work I've done in the past—there have been a lot of men.

RACHEL: I think it has to do with the difference with cats—they're domesticated. They're prevalent. They're around, versus a wild creature like a flying squirrel, or a seal. Men get more of a kick out of working with wild animals.

There is no simple explanation for the over-representation of women in Guardians. While gender as a social identity usually marginalizes women in organizations, it operates as an enabler for these women in this organization. Gender formed an affiliation based on feminist qualities of connected care and collaboration.

Class and educational status were never mentioned in Veronica's case. When members were asked how they felt watching Gertrude and Helga pick on Veronica,

compassion was expressed for her endurance and loyalty to their mission; yet, no one linked this pecking order to her lower power status in class and education.

(FG)

VERONICA: They looked silly brutalizing me. Even when I thought I might want to make a comment, I didn't. That was bizarre. They went off on a comma. I was the target. I just went along with it. They knew they couldn't get to Frances. They wouldn't cross the path of Rachel. It was *playground mentality*.

FRANCES: First of all, Veronica was the secretary. She took on that role. They were picking on the role but they were picking on Veronica, too. If anything, with Veronica being in the role of the new person, new secretary, someone they hadn't known for years, they should have been easy on her and hard on me. Say if I was the secretary. But it was the opposite. They picked on Veronica.

VERONICA: Well, first, they railroaded me into being the secretary. I did not want to be the secretary, from day one. I did not want it, but no one else wanted it.

FRANCES: And we had to put names down to get the paperwork to incorporate.

VERONICA: I think I made a poster and everybody decided I was going to be the secretary. I was, like no, I don't really want to be, and it just happened.

RACHEL: If they spent two hours on the meeting minutes, you don't get anything else done in the meeting. You don't give anybody else a chance to have the floor. There's no chance to have discussions. That was their way of controlling the meeting. That's why I didn't bring new people in.

VERONICA: I hated it. My heart was beating in my throat, but I didn't know what to do. I didn't know what to say. I don't know *Robert's Rules of Order* and I don't have any desire to learn. I rather spend my time with cats. It was better to say nothing. I'm not the kind of person to sit back and let people crap on me. What Rachel said after one meeting inspired me for a very long time. She said, "That was not *Robert's Rules of Order*, that was *Gertrude's Rules of Order*."

Frances shifted the focus of bullying to the educational status of Helga and Gertrude. "But I'm thinking that there was this perception of two professors running a

class.” Both Helga and Gertrude are professors at elite, private colleges. Helga teaches language and Gertrude teaches science. Rachel was challenged:

(FG)

RACHEL: Well, wait a minute. I attended one of those private, elite colleges. You want to play hard ball with someone who went there? Fine, play hard ball with me, because I went to Jones College where Gertrude teaches. I have a Jones College education and you know what they taught me at Jones? Speak your mind! So you want to get in my way? You’ll get it!

VERONICA: I don’t think Helga really cared about the cat rescue. She just wanted to lord over people, brag about her degrees and act like she was in power. She’d hold people hostage on the telephone, in the evening, when she didn’t have anything better to do.

Finally, the unspoken presence of class was brought up. Frances, Veronica and Rachel routinely delivered the support for their organization’s activities, while only Frances had the discretionary financial backing to maintain their commitment to cats:

(FG)

FRANCES: Veronica, Rachel and I had been dealing with the cat poop and scratches. So, I really felt entitled to the control, because of what we were doing for cats, and what they were not doing.

VERONICA: And the power of the purse strings. Frances donated a lot of money.

FRANCES: Not then.

VERONICA: Yes. Your place. Food. Litter.

FRANCES: I felt entitled because of the work that we were doing.

A Feminist Approach of Care and Connection Collides with a
Masculine Approach of Unilateral Command and Control.

A few informal alliances developed into a stronger coalition of shared beliefs around not only how animals should be treated, but the treatment of people as well. Seneca really likes a team effort and thinks most members were appreciative of each other:

(I-Seneca)

I like the people. I trust Frances who was really leading this effort. I trust her instincts and know that she cares about the animals. I know that the bottom line with her is the welfare of the animals. Given the two sides, I just trusted her more.

At the same time, Seneca did not appreciate Helga running the organization in an undemocratic way that would not attract new members to get involved. Also, she was exasperated with executive decisions made in secrecy and board meetings that dragged on without end.

Most members shared an emotional level of caring for cats, the organization and each other, excluding Helga and Gertrude. In fact, after one disruptive meeting, Seneca approached Gertrude and said, "Let me give you a hug." Gertrude withdrew, exclaiming, "Don't touch me. I don't give hugs. My cats don't even get hugs from me."

Sharing Seneca's distress over meetings, Ariadne was upset watching the impact of conflict on members during meetings. One time, the mounting stress triggered a migraine for Rachel and she had to leave. Ariadne did not expect such lack of compassion from an organization committed to animal care:

(I-Ariadne)

I had to grit my teeth when there was a lot of conflict in the meetings. I was just being loyal to Frances to go at all because it was really unpleasant. There was really a lot of conflict. It wasn't much anger, but I'd feel sad for the people who are either ignorant or abused and I thought it was so self-destructive to be so careless to other people.

All meetings opened with minutes from the previous meeting and at one meeting, Helga and Gertrude corrected Veronica's minutes, out loud, line by line, for an hour-and-a-half. Ariadne recalls witnessing this.

(I-Ariadne)

The poor secretary [Veronica]—she can't spell. I can't spell, so I have great empathy for anyone who can't spell, and Helga said there were so many misspellings she should do the whole report over and that's nonsense. So things were about power and control really and the animals could have been chimpanzees or computers or tennis paddles—it was the organization that Helga wanted to control.

Helga, as President, snubbed members during the meetings. Members would wave their hands for recognition to speak but Helga would blatantly take no notice. The eventual power shift was emphatically important to Ariadne:

(I-Ariadne)

I feel like part of a core group now starting up and it's important to support this. I feel it's important to get this going now. They are good people and I think they do good things. The negativity made me want to stay and help.

Frances tried to reason with Helga but it was hard to cut through emotional barriers of anger and hostility transmitted at meetings. Frances began to think Guardians with Helga translated into fewer cats being helped, while Guardians without Helga translated into more cats being helped.

(I-Frances)

I'm not trying to be mean to her. I don't care—I barely know her. Nobody in the group wanted to be mean. Nobody took satisfaction. I think that's because the values are predominantly on the side of not hurting any living creature—whether you hurt their emotions or put them in fear. That's the value of everyone else in the group. That's why none of this hostility stuff would be tolerated. We see it as rights. We would see that as mean, creating suffering and that's not what we're about.

High levels of interaction and communication outside of meetings reinforced relationships in the organization, and in turn, increased degrees of interaction and action. Frances says it is much easier to help animals with a group of people behind you than to do it alone. The organization provides a network of relationships so people know who to call when cats are abandoned. Guardians has newspaper and local television visibility, community recognition and veterinary support. Frances recalls Helga referring to members as, “you people,” and “they just don't listen.”

(I-Frances)

For someone so well educated I don't know how she couldn't see how foolish she looked in front of the group. Did she think everybody would side with her? She polarized the group. It's one thing when you're in a battle—you say negative things and the bits may fall 60-40 or 50-50, but here it fell 95-5! It had to do with the animals. I didn't go out of my way to hurt Helga. We wanted to keep Gertrude as a member. I did not think it was going to come to this.

Reflecting on the conflict, Rachel noticed a turning point when Seneca, who is viewed as strong, opinionated and confident, declared her alliance to Frances. Rachel was surprised when Helga and Gertrude left. She regrets losing Gertrude's experience and feels sad over the split in Seneca and Gertrude's friendship. With Helga, it was different:

(I-Rachel)

There was no way that Helga was going to stay and that doesn't necessarily bother me. I stole her thunder by pre-empting her—she couldn't quit. She couldn't resign because we had already taken her job away. You can't resign from a position you don't have. I think that was the end for her because she did not want to watch that happen. That actually wasn't the hard part for me. The hard part for me was Gertrude.

Over and over, members express grief over losing members, yet remain committed to upholding their mission within a culture of care and connection. They firmly believe that conflict is worthwhile when the issues at stake are worthwhile. While the collective response to conflict during meetings was silent observation, members felt extremely uncomfortable with its uncertainty. Ariadne thinks the conflict could have dissolved their organization:

(I-Ariadne)

It was just nip and tuck that we got through. The organization almost stopped existing. We reorganized. The conflict was pushed away and a new organization was created. Now I think there is a lot of hope.

Ariadne prefers a facilitator to navigate the tough parts of conflict so everyone can be involved and productive. In other groups, she witnessed less emphasis on leadership and more emphasis on compelling issues. Ultimately, she's delighted to see a viable organization emerge.

Seneca admits that, while the conflict was necessary, she regrets losing a friend. Seneca wanted to remain friends with Gertrude, who felt betrayed and severed their relationship. Seneca still views Gertrude as an extremely fair person committed to social processes, yet not as committed as she is to the animals.

Frances perceives this conflict as life threatening for the organization. They could have relinquished control to Helga and Gertrude or completely dismantled. One

by one, members announced to her that they were quitting Guardians—Ariadne and Seneca were worn out, the meetings were negative and they weren't helping animals. Even Rachel offered to throw in the towel and start a new group. In contrast, Frances resolved to reclaim Guardians' history and the organization they had built.

In the bigger picture, Frances thinks the conflict was definitely worth experiencing because cats will continue to be placed in wonderful homes. If the organization did not survive, cats would not receive medical attention or be adopted into homes. She judges the outcome of their conflict in terms of successful placements—two kittens each living 20 years in happy, protected homes with owners to enjoy their company would make 40 years of positive outcome. Most of all, Guardians' work will continue—she is certain that if they had not fought, the organization would have shut down. To Frances, the conflict was a nuisance, yet she knew she had to support members who were worn down by the oppressive leadership. They had to be reminded that the animals needed them and that no cat should be denied care. She found great satisfaction in knowing justice had prevailed.

Rachel appreciates going through the conflict just so the organization did not have to continue to fight itself to carry out its mission. In her view, the majority cut out the minority to eliminate counter-productive control. On an individual level, successfully getting through this experience with Guardians helps her to focus on the grand scheme of life, to sort out what is important and what is not. While she thinks this is one of the more interesting conflicts she's experienced, she wonders if this could happen in a workplace setting, where there is probably no such thing as ousting the

boss. She's pleased they used rules and procedures instead of bitter name slinging to remove Helga and Gertrude from power, but she regrets the loss of Gertrude:

(I-Rachel)

I have never been able to understand why people would put themselves through the stress of conflict when they are in an all-volunteer organization. Yes, they are there because they want to be, but that also means the organization has less control over them. You can't say to somebody: 'Well you're fired! I'm not going to pay you because you didn't do your job.' Guardians almost doesn't fall under that because everyone does take it seriously because we're not talking about providing entertainment, we're talking about saving animals' lives. We're talking about making their lives better. And people just—they can't be petty about Guardians. It's about something that really matters.

Overall, data from the second research question shows a relationship between conflict, the social self and the organizational structure. In the form of *Roberts' Rules of Order*, the organizational structure serves to reinforce unilateral power and control, silence members, and suppress differences. However, the same organizational structure provides a paradox of power to challenge authority. This in turn surfaces contradictions between the organization's explicit mission and the implicit values of its members that provoke the emergence of gender as a social identity and an ideology. The result of the conflict culminates in a feminist approach of care and connection colliding with a masculine approach of unilateral command and control.

Constellation of Themes: Question #3

Finally, the third research question asks, "What do routines and relationships contribute to the expression and suppression of organizational conflict—and vice versa?"

Routines Unravel and Relationships Reform to Reorganize and Reclaim the Organization.

In her interview, Rachel reveals that more time was spent discussing how to deal with the meeting situation than on routine Guardians' activities. Approximately four to five nights a week, Frances would telephone Rachel and Veronica via a three-way conference call. Over a span of about three hours per call, they discussed the upcoming meeting format in terms of what points they were bringing up, how they would do that, what they wanted to get across, what they wanted to accomplish and what could wait until after the elections.

Once objectives were clarified, each one was assigned a role for the meeting. For example, it was decided that Rachel would make a point because she wasn't part of the conflict and Veronica would make another point because she was the secretary. Frances would make another point and Seneca would plan to support it. Potential conflicts were strategically anticipated, and counter approaches discussed to accomplish the desired objectives within their expected meeting time. In Rachel's words:

(I-Rachel)

We're talking about a political amoebae. Frances would come up with an idea and she'd kind of say, 'Rachel?'.... and I'd join with her and the *amoebae* would get bigger, and Veronica would come in, and it just kind of spiraled on. There were moments when I thought this is never going to work. This is never going to work. How can we be so sure? I used to think, *are we doing the right thing?* Because you listen to the other people argue and you can't help but feel bad about it. You're sitting there thinking, *are we going to win this?*

Rachel attributes much of the alliance's success to critical roles that emerged with critical tasks in mind, a coupling that integrated individual strengths to meet their objectives. She recalls at one point feeling that the members were powerless to oppose

the power and control of Helga and Gertrude, until she pulled in Zen to create the Rachel-Zen "Swat Team." Rachel and Zen are co-workers in a software company and have eight years experience in various nonprofit organizations. Rachel was worried their wheels were spinning to no avail—Frances was the sole voice of dissension and had become an easy target. Veronica was afraid to speak up and put forth ideas that might stage public humiliation. Helga and Gertrude routinely attacked Veronica about the poor quality of her minutes. Rachel realized change was necessary:

(I-Rachel)

OK, this needs to happen. I firmly like this organization. I like the people. I like the ideal of what these people are doing. I want to help them out. So, I said, 'Okay, Zen, I need you because I need the moral support. I could be just like Veronica. If this is going to work out, they have to be taken out of power. And in order to get them out of power, I need you to help me out.' I am the idea person and Zen is the strategy man. That's how we always work together. We do that from coding projects to support issues—everything, personal stuff. Zen and I would talk about Guardians at lunch during the week.

Rachel explained that Zen is not one to spend hours on the phone at night, so she and Frances discussed issues before she went to Zen with the goals they wanted to accomplish. Frances discovered a provision in *Robert's Rules of Order* that said the voting could be moved forward and she wanted Rachel and Zen to figure out how to pull it off at Guardians' annual meeting.

(I-Rachel)

I would go to Zen and say, 'OK, bullet point—we want x, y and z.' That's my job—tech support people are translators between tekkies and regular people—to translate stuff in format to something the person can understand. I took Frances-Rachel talk and translated it into Zen talk. 'Our hurdles are a, b, c. What do we do?' And Zen goes, 'OK.' And we would figure it out. He would say, 'Here's *Robert's Rules of Order* number blah, blah, blah, all you have to do is this.' And I would change it into layman's terms and repeat it back to him and say what I understood him to be saying. 'If we have to move this item up, we have to do this.'

But what if they?' And we would find a way until we had all the holes stopped up.

Rachel filled Frances in about what she and Zen had developed, and when Frances asked the same questions Rachel had asked Zen, she was able to address her concerns. Organizational activity heightened on what had to be accomplished and who would be able to do it best. Routine activities were redirected as relationships formed around the critical roles necessary to uphold their understanding of the organization's mission.

The third research question generated data showing a connection between conflict and the organizational relationships and routines. Relationships strategically reformed to reorganize and reclaim their organization.

Narrative Aftermath

Readers of this account might be wondering what happened next. I continued to study the group for four more months, attending meetings, transcribing notes and holding one more focus group. Here is my knowledge and interpretation of subsequent events. Helga's grand exit from the meeting and her submitting the completed reports suggests that she anticipated the takeover. Although, Gertrude was not prepared to know how it was going to happen (Gertrude stayed on), my observations in meetings suggested covert interactions between Helga and Gertrude did occur. Had they agreed to an interview, I might have heard a very similar story of late night phone calls and strategic planning.

I also learned subsequently that Olive, who is not mentioned as an active co-conspirator, was elected president but stepped down at the emergency board meeting

and Rachel moved into her place as acting president. After the annual elections, Gertrude sued Guardians for lifetime medical care of her diabetic foster cat. She named Frances in a civil court case against the organization and complained to the State's Attorney General. In a preliminary hearing before a court magistrate, Gertrude settled for \$200 and agreed to leave Guardians. Since then, she has joined a worldwide movement involving women of conscience and stands on street corners in weekly, silent vigils in protest of war, interethnic conflict, militarism, the arms industry, racism, neo-Nazism, and violence against women. Frances continues to sustain Guardians with her own funds and Helga has not been heard from.

Summary

The findings in Chapter 4 confirm the significant role of conflict, its association with structure, routines and relationships, and its multiple facets of expression in this organization. I conclude this chapter with a summary of points that serve as a transition for my interpretation and analysis in Chapter 5. Briefly, here are my key findings.

Question number one, "What is the role of conflict in this organization?" generated the following themes:

- Conflict emphasizes significant differences among individuals and reveals their underlying ideologies.
- Conflict clarifies organizational identity and redefines mission.
- Conflict surfaces contradictions between implicit values of individuals and the explicit mission of the organization.

Question number two, “What is the relationship of conflict to the social self and the organizational structure?” generated these themes:

- The organizational structure serves to reinforce unilateral power and control, silence members and suppress differences.
- The same organizational structure provides a paradox of power to challenge authority.
- Gender operates as a social identity and an ideology.
- A feminist approach of care and connection collides with a masculine approach of unilateral command and control.

Question number three, “What do routines and relationships contribute to the expression and suppression of organizational conflict—and vice versa?” surfaced the following themes:

- Routines unravel and relationships reform to reorganize and reclaim the *organization.

The overall unfolding of the conflict story line, the roles of its primary participants, and the sequence of conflicts that arose demonstrate the complex value of conflict in the development of this organization. In Chapter 5, I will discuss these findings in connection with the conflict and social justice literature.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Introduction

A number of themes related to my research questions emerged from the data collected and described in Chapter Four. In this chapter, I interpret these findings using two analytic frameworks established earlier in my literature review. First, the conflict described in this dissertation is examined within an individual, work group, social group, and structural/systemic conflict framework to explore the appropriateness and usefulness of a multilevel approach to understanding conflict. While this type of analysis is grounded in the existing conflict literature and provides explanations at each organizational level, it fails to address the entire range of themes that surfaced in Chapter Four. Therefore, in the second part of this chapter, I revisit the research questions and emphasize the most striking themes in order to establish a more complex analysis and understanding of this conflict. Conclusions are summarized in terms of how this study confirms, disconfirms, and extends the literature. The dissertation culminates with implications for the practice, unanswered questions and proposals for future research.

The multilevel conflict analysis described in Part I is an organizing framework in which theoretical perspectives espoused by Folger, Stutman, and Poole (1997) have been adapted within organizational conflict levels from Rahim (1986). By including individual, work group, social group, systemic, and structural components, my analysis of the data continues a dialogic format between the literature cited in Chapter Two and

the lived experiences of this study. Additionally, my discussion is supplemented and extended by a social justice lens that provides a more complex dimension of analysis with richer descriptions of influential factors related to the larger social system in the hierarchical context of social dominance and subordination.

Guardians' Conflict at the Individual Level

Pinpointing organizational conflict analysis at the individual level singles out each person as a possible source of conflict as well as possible remedy. In the case of Guardians, focusing on individuals emphasizes personal traits, attitudes, and thoughts of its key members—Helga, Gertrude, Frances, Rachel, and Veronica. The following discussion demonstrates the relevance of such an application to the Guardians' conflict.

Conflict Psychodynamics

Freud's (1947) psychodynamic perspective provides a psychological explanation of conflict and attributes the angry outbursts in Guardians' meetings to individual repression. The random attacks on less powerful members (e. g. Helga on Veronica) would be traced to the frustration of unmet needs such as control of Guardians' finances. A psychodynamic analysis attends to motivating factors and one could surmise that psychological needs fueled Helga's aggression; Veronica served as an easy, less powerful target.

Freud's approach, however, is limited by the inaccessibility of psychological profiles in the data. While such data could be quite interesting, it is doubtful a researcher would be able to obtain or use such information. Participants might refuse to

grant interviews and a psychotherapeutic intervention is outside the bounds of organizational research and consultation. The closest diagnostic tool useful for such analysis is an emotional intelligence inventory to indicate problematic behavior patterns in organizational relationships followed by behavior-change training. Some Guardians' members noted that Helga and Gertrude caused the conflict by decisions they made as well as how they treated members, so it's doubtful a psychological intervention would solve the conflict.

In contrast, a social justice lens situates each individual hierarchically within patterns of social dominance and subordination. Helga and Gertrude represent a dominant social class (college professors) while a subordinate social class (unemployed) stigmatizes Veronica. Such class stratification thoroughly exposes an imbalance of power in both educational and class status. When Veronica accepted the labor intensive role of secretary and agreed to record the minutes, she unknowingly accepted the negative consequences of a devalued position in which she was vulnerable to correction, humiliation, and attack by Helga and Gertrude from their sanctioned roles of President and Board Member. This servitude compounded Veronica's apparent sense of internalized inferiority. While organizational roles appeared openly stratified, the individual hierarchy based on social identity was unrecognized.

All Guardians members had attained a college degree except Veronica, and unfortunately, the secretarial function exposed her writing and organizational competency. While Veronica's unemployment afforded ample availability to volunteer, it placed her in the uncomfortable dynamic of being the subordinate cleric to the

dominant administrator-in-charge. This financial dichotomy set the stage for a hierarchy of status and decision-making power.

In contrast, when Rachel entered Guardians with \$1,700 in charitable donations from her workplace, she was guaranteed good standing and instant power to influence the group. In the same sense, Frances was at liberty to donate personal money that forced decisions, such as adding another telephone line, paying off the veterinarian, launching the campaign for new officers, saving Guardians from bankruptcy, and essentially conducting Guardians' business on her own chosen terms. While class distinctions did not cause the conflict, power differentials emerged based upon financial status of some members with resources that pitted one against the other and influenced conflict dynamics.

Conflict Styles

With the same emphasis on the individual, a styles perspective simply diagnoses members by conflict styles based on a concern for self and others. In an observation of conflict styles during Guardians' meetings, most members avoided conflict silently or struggled to accommodate Helga and Gertrude at the expense of the organization's mission. Helga and Gertrude exhibited confrontational styles that satisfied their own concerns at the expense of other members. Drawing upon a collaborative style, Frances and Rachel exposed the authoritarian, judgmental patterns of Helga and Gertrude, and formed a shadow coalition that redefined Guardians' greater organizational identity. While conflict styles may provide easy templates to follow, as Luloffs (1994) contends,

a direct link of styles to the source of conflict is unclear in this situation and simply modifying conflict styles would not rectify the Guardians' conflict.

Adding a social justice lens to this styles perspective provides a closer examination of the Guardians' meeting and decision making structure. On one hand, *Robert's Rules of Order* provided a traditional mechanism for the organization to maintain meeting order and make decisions (a common tool in nonprofit organizations). On the other hand, *Roberts' Rules of Order* supported a rigid system of rules-based control whereby Helga and Gertrude used a confrontational style to maintain their own domination and power as well as avert the efforts of other group members to be more collaborative. Helga's confrontational style represents a masculine role orientation often adopted in organizations. This will be analyzed in a discussion of gendered approaches later in this chapter.

While meeting dynamics demonstrate that interactions shape conflict, Frances' use of a collaborative style (paraphrasing, reflecting, circular questioning) failed to influence Helga or resolve the conflict. Also, Frances used a relational style that accessed high levels of femininity, in contrast to Helga's high levels of masculinity. A styles-type intervention in Guardians would be ineffective if members failed to follow through with communication skills training and it is doubtful Helga would relinquish a style that supported her preferred authoritarian leadership.

Personal Attributes

Continuing to view conflict at the individual level, attribution theory roots conflict in negative attributes such as when Helga verbally attacked members and

maneuvered secretly to control Guardians' activities while projecting an image that she was merely managing an organization out of control. A social justice perspective would expose such negative attributes as signals of internalized dominance privileged by her social identity and position (education, class, and presidential role). Aside from justifying Helga's expulsion, it is doubtful an attributes-based intervention could substantially assist with this conflict.

Argumentation Skills

Verbal aggressiveness theory directs attention to argumentation skills. Helga might have attacked members because she lacked skills to argue her points, while Frances used argumentation skills to put forth major issues. These contrasting behaviors support the premise that when used effectively, argumentation positively relates to successful organizational outcomes, whereas weak argumentation escalates into verbal aggressiveness and damages relationships (Infante, 1985). As argumentation within the organization escalated, relationships deteriorated.

For example, after Frances discovered medical care had been cut off from the cats, she sought justification from Helga at a board meeting by consistently probing for an explanation and clarifying the reasoning. These actions seemed to irritate Helga who counter-attacked by blaming the inability of members to listen and manage money effectively. Each time Helga criticized members, Frances attempted to shift direction to larger concepts at issue, such as leadership responsibilities, mission accountability and organizational identity. Yet with each endeavor, Helga delivered sharp, personal diatribes on the entire membership and threatened the demise of their organization.

A social justice view of verbal aggression and argumentation could assert that Frances's middle class educational background, which included a law degree, equipped her with dominant white, Western-specific, business-based communication skills consistent with mainstream norms. However, there is no explanation why Helga, with her extensive education, did not exhibit similar capabilities.

Reciprocity

Normally, members of Guardians struggled to avoid conflict and maintain relationships, even when Helga cut off medical care to cats. This taken-for-granted reciprocity suffered a breach when conflict became so embroiled that members were forced to choose sides. Having been friends for a long time, Gertrude expected Seneca to support her position unconditionally. However, Seneca drew a line between friendship and ideological beliefs when the conflict threatened her deeper commitment to the organizational mission. Since both assumed nonnegotiable positions based on different goals, neither fulfilled each other's expectation for reciprocal treatment. When Seneca failed to align with Gertrude's position, Gertrude alienated Seneca as her friend. The result was a shock to Seneca, who expected that organizational politics and personal friendships would be separate and their friendship would be maintained outside the organization.

Reciprocity is a social justice value when given a level playing field where people help and support each other in terms of alliance and inclusivity. For example, Frances and Veronica practiced reciprocity for the sake of their larger interest in the mission of Guardians, in spite of class, professional, and educational differences. It was

widely accepted that Frances provided ready money to solve organizational problems and Veronica reciprocated with relentless commitment to Guardians, diligence in maintaining records, and volunteer time. The reciprocity between Frances and Veronica crossed class lines based on shared organizational values in which the ideological consensus superseded class difference. While class divided Helga and Veronica, the same class difference between Frances and Veronica became irrelevant based on their ideological convergence. In this organization, class exacerbates conflict between certain members but class issues simply evaporated between other members who were able to reach consensus based on ideological agreement (or possibly feminism), thus equalizing the power differentials in their social identities.

Social Confrontation

Following along the same lines of unspoken expectations, social confrontation theory formulates implicit social rules that prescribe acceptable and unacceptable behaviors. In the case of Guardians, Helga broke a significant social rule when she recorded the questionable phone message to incoming calls for help to Guardians and when she cut off medical care to cats. While not openly explicit, most Guardians' members subscribed to a social rule of respect and fair treatment. Conflict erupted with the violation of this rule and resolution became difficult when members could not agree on legitimacy, which led to a breach that proved impossible to mediate, renegotiate or restore harmony.

From a social justice perspective, prevailing rules usually reflect dominance. When Helga and Gertrude violated the explicit mission of Guardians by cutting off care

to cats, they attempted to renegotiate but failed to filter through barriers of dominance and power. This led to a more serious infraction of another rule reflecting their deeper value of respectful treatment toward each other. Frances sensed this infraction immediately and lobbied rigorously to inform the others. Subsequently, she and Rachel formed a coalition to upset Helga and Gertrude's power and redefine organizational rules to match their values.

Summary of the Individual Level

Analysis at the individual level of the Guardians' organizational conflict provides diagnoses that are easy to understand along with ways to identify attitudes and behaviors that can be modified in response to conflict. Overall, these analyses suggest interventions to enhance self-knowledge and personal awareness and organizational development to overcome negative, unproductive behaviors. While not wanting to over-generalize the Guardians' conflict, the experiences of conflict in this organization have implications to the literature.

First, this conflict suggests that Freud's psychodynamics perspectives are well beyond the bounds of most conflict interventions, especially in respect to accessibility of data and application of an intervention. It also confirms the limits of a styles perspective and while easily adaptable, the course of conflict was not altered when Frances used a collaborative style, Helga used a confrontational style and members used avoidance styles. As the conflict developed, knowing and using styles would not have publicly facilitated the outcome desired by the majority of its members.

However, behind the scenes, like-minded members quite skillfully used collaborative styles to form a coalition that overthrew the administration and reorganized Guardians around their implicit value system. This prompts the question—are conflict styles best utilized when value systems match? Styles may actually reveal gendered approaches that are masculine and feminine-based and further link conflict to issues of social identity and ideology.

The Guardian's organizational conflict confirms that negative personal attributes add to the discomfort of conflict, but changing Helga's negativity would not have resolved the deeper issues at stake for Guardians. The conflict also confirms the literature on argumentation skills; Helga demonstrated deficiencies in the effectiveness of her arguments while Frances demonstrated mastery that enabled her to rally support for her position. However, it was not the conflict talk, but the coup to steal power with elected officers that determined the outcome. The concept of reciprocity is also demonstrated in the Guardians' conflict. Breaches in reciprocity increasingly highlighted differences in values and norms that threatened the mission of their organization. In fact, the Guardians' conflict upholds a dazzling bond of reciprocity when Frances and Veronica superseded class and educational differences for the sake of their mutual interest in organizational identity.

The Guardians' conflict also confirms that significant social rules are at the seams of conflict. Once ruptured, these are difficult to mend unless parties dedicate a great deal of effort to accomplish this goal. Helga's phone message violated unspoken organizational assumptions that in turn reveal tears in the fabric of both the individual

and organizational identity. Once these differences became evident, working together grew increasingly difficult.

Findings at the individual level clearly extend social justice perspectives in terms of social dominance and subordination rooted in class, education, and position. Frances accessed a money flow that influenced the progression of conflict and its outcome. Helga inherited a position from which she was able to temporarily execute decision-making power on the Guardians' mission. In a push-pull manner, Veronica internalized a sense of inferiority rendering her ineffective in the face of conflict, while Helga seized control of the organization through displays of internalized dominance.

Observations at the individual level of analysis contribute to an understanding of organizational conflict, yet they are limited in scope compared to the tasks within the organization, the overall mission, and the greater societal issues. In the next section, I expand the multilevel analysis to include a discussion of organizational conflict levels of the social and work group, and continue to build a more complex composite of this conflict.

Guardians' Conflict at the Social Group and Work Group Level

Up to this point, I have discussed an analysis of the organization as a single work group, which in fact it is. I have also focused on the relationships between a fairly small group of members holding meetings to make decisions. For an organization evolving in its development, such as Guardians, the organizational conflict literature tends to focus on the impact of organizational roles upon group interaction, such as the dynamics between the President and the Secretary. Up to this point, the social justice

perspective has emphasized issues of social hierarchy and the interconnections of social identities. However, the social justice perspective offers another contribution to the analysis of social groups entirely distinct from the work groups that are described in the organizational literature. Although previously described earlier in the literature review, I will clarify major points here for the purposes of my extended discussion.

A social justice perspective requires an analysis of social groups that is different from other understandings of groups. A social justice analysis looks at interpersonal, organizational, and institutional dynamics as they are framed and organized by social group identities hierarchically structured within the boundaries of race, gender, class, ethnicity, ability, and sexual orientation. Those hierarchies result in social inequality that are based on how social group identities inform and play out in almost all interpersonal dynamics. Therefore, when examining conflict inside organizations, the social justice perspective requires that we look at how social group identities play out as distinct from, but also contributing to, work group, committee and other group affiliations.

Iris Marion Young (1990), a political scientist and philosopher, has contributed much of the foundation for understanding how social groups differ from other groups. According to Young (1990), groups are merely congregations or clusters of people formed around social processes and relationships and delineate along aggregate, association, interest, ideology, and social distinctions. Aggregates assemble people together through simple, apolitical attributes, such as hair color, house type, age, etc., of which members may identify individually or in common with others. In associations, individuals volunteer and/or join a unit, while still maintaining a fluid individual and

group identity. Both an aggregate and an association can form into an interest group of people with the similar goal. For example, a group of friends who want to end the suffering of cats abandoned by departing college students could be called an interest group formed around the same interest, i.e., rescuing cats. Specifically, Guardians represented an interest group in its early days of formation.

Young (1990) identifies an ideological group as one formed around shared political beliefs. In the case of Guardians, some members considered themselves politically motivated based on animal rights. Still other members only identified as a special interest group concerned with volunteering to help cats in the interest of animal welfare. A manifestation of the latter occurred when Helga offended some members by wearing a fur coat because she was concerned with animal welfare but didn't subscribe to political beliefs supporting animal rights. Therefore, she justified wearing a fur (especially a second-hand fur). Members who identified with the animal rights political agenda felt horrified, because Helga symbolized their organization's figurehead. While ideological and interest groups share overlapping concerns, each identifies separately from the other.

Additionally, Young separates special interest and ideological groups from social groups. Young (1990) states that group memberships are based on ascribed social identities such as gender, race, ethnicity, class, religion, age, etc., falling into such categories as Latino, working class, Jewish, and senior citizens. Social groups are significant from one or more groups by culture or a way of life and identify with a common social status. While work groups organize around work function and work related tasks, social identity group membership intersects the work group and provides a

way to frame an analysis in terms of social domination and subordination. So, one particular work group may be charged with a job function yet comprised of members with multiple social group identities. Young (1990) lobbies for greater understanding of the relationship of social groups to oppression and charges that the discounting of social group differences actually serves to reproduce social injustice. A social group level analysis generates a deeper understanding of the contribution of critical social processes to organizational conflict.

For example, the Guardians' conflict narrative is rich with gender implications and contributes qualitative data describing individual understanding of social identity. According to Cook-Huffman (2000) such analysis is limited in the literature. Guardian's members did not readily identify with their social group membership, yet in the focus group discussion they overwhelmingly revealed feminist interests based on an ethic of care for domestic animals. This supports Kreisberg's (1982) finding that conflict increases one's consciousness of social identity and facilitates its development. While Guardians' members did not openly integrate social identity into their organizational discourse and did not call themselves feminists, they operated in a gendered manner that intensified with the progression of their conflict.

This clarity and maturation process of social identity supports the Cook-Huffman (2000) finding that views social identity as both a fixed and fluid construct developing over the course of conflict. In Guardians, gender emerged as a dominant, shared, social identity, and the few men in this organization acted solely on behalf of the women. Gender was informed by an implicit ideology of feminism linked to a care taking, nurturing ideology of care for animals, and shaped the process and content of

decisions. Social identity provides a vehicle for understanding the larger context and interpreting the deeper value system in the Guardians' conflict. Subsequently, as the conflict in Guardians grew and enlarged, so did the ideology of an implicit feminist social identity founded on an ethic of care for domestic animals (cats as pets). Members did not access feminism until those beliefs were violated.

Adding an organizational conflict analysis at the level of the social group and the work group widens the scope from interpersonal conflict to the dynamics occurring within relationships, including influences of society-at-large as well as the task-at-hand. Viewing group conflict at multiple levels helps to link the influences of group participation on conflict dynamics. Conflicts arising from work and social groups are quite different from each other and can be overshadowed by a larger organizational identity (Richard & Grimes, 1996).

In the case of Guardians, the greater organizational identity actually motivated members to redefine their mission and organize for a greater collective cause. Kahn, et. al., (1964) determined that social identities are seldom acknowledged in work groups and this was the norm in Guardians. While one could assume social identities were not central to the organization, it is worth noting that Seneca withheld disclosure of sexual orientation and religious identity, Veronica did not openly talk about class and educational status, and Frances operated as if her finances were not a factor. To examine these obscure details and links to conflict, it is imperative to trace conflict to social group and work group levels.

Social Identity Frames

Expanding on this concept of the social group, social identity frames provide a point of reference for understanding the context of an organization, and how members perceive and interpret actions. Since the Guardians organization is predominantly comprised of women, a prevailing social identity based on gender dominates the context of their organization and influences how Guardians' members determine standards and approaches.

Work Groups

Initially, Guardians was simply a group of people (mainly women) working together to promote animal welfare and develop informal friendships. The founder, Violet, provided a spiritual vision for the organization at the local community level and with few resources formed a cohesive association relatively free of conflicts. During the early years of Guardians few expectations for tasks and relationships existed and no one person took charge until the need for a decision arose.

However, once Violet moved away, the group thought they needed a formal structure to continue without her. This is when Helga agreed to be President. Helga lacked the charisma and vision of its founder, substituting rules and regulations in place of meeting openness and informality, much to the dissatisfaction of certain members. Without being a formal organization, they had little recourse beyond their informal affiliation and telephone conversations. Whether they realized it or not, agreeing to incorporate planted the seeds for an emerging, formal structure as well as the escalation of conflict.

Set on the path to incorporation, their initial interest group transformed into formal work groups with bylaws, agendas and minutes. Task-related conflict was not a problem until certain actions revealed different values systems within their decision-making. Guardians struggled significantly with organizational identity and processes: who were they as a group, who were they to each other, how would they relate to each other and how would they conduct business. Jehn, Northcraft & Neale (1999) claimed the effectiveness of work groups with diverse skill sets could be stimulated by a small amount of task conflict. Such was the case with Guardians. For instance, Veronica rescued lost pets, Frances nursed ill pets, Rachel designed the web site, and Seneca organized fundraisers. Around these tasks, there was considerable productive conversation on how to accomplish their goals. Eventually, however, they met obstacles in their competing values and struggled to agree on work relationships and work processes. The progression of Guardians into a formal corporation followed a natural group development process outlined by Tuckman (1965) (norming, storming, forming, performing) and conflict was to be expected.

Field Theory

A field theory application to Guardians expands work group relationships in terms of context, climate and life space. A shift occurs in Guardians, from an informal, cooperative, supportive climate, to a formal, competitive, defensive climate in which members perceive each other with negativity and mistrust. While Guardians' members expected routine activities in the context of their mission to help cats, they did not anticipate the series of complications brought on by the processes of formal

incorporation. Although departing from an informal, friendship-based organization posed multiple challenges, conflict was actually triggered by “how” business was conducted. Members did not challenge a formal structure—they learned *Robert’s Rules of Order* and complied with it. The breaking point came when they detected an autocratic manipulation of *Robert’s Rules of Order* to carry through and disguise a decision that was offensive and too large to overlook. Consequently, members were unprepared for the negative power shift and altered life space threatening their mission. A field theory intervention would diagnose levels of supportiveness and defensiveness and its usefulness would depend on the willingness of members to implement changes.

Game Theory

Game theory provides a similar analysis, viewing individuals in conflict through a competitive game board metaphor of winners and losers who strategize moves and countermoves in order to outsmart opponents. While Frances, Rachel, and Zen possessed the communication ability to out-strategize Helga and Gertrude, most other members did not have the skills or desire to compete over deeply felt values. A game theory intervention would format this conflict in terms of wins and losses, yet reducing resolution to the spirit of competition and competence discounts the historical context and social relevance of the organization. A so-called win would be tenuously tied to an ongoing survival of the fittest mentality and not the continuation of Guardians’ mission.

Coordinated Management of Meaning

Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) explains Guardians' conflict in terms of a worldview filtering meaning. This is similar to the contextual frames of Cook-Huffman (2000) in that worldview is shaped differently by culture, class, race, religion, sexual orientation, age, ability, gender and educational status. For example, Rachel's worldview was shaped by multiple identities, including such social group categories as heterosexual, white, professional, female, and in her 30's. As reported in the data collection chapter, most Guardians' members seemed oblivious to social identity variances, instead favoring a superseding organizational identity that was assumed to represent collective identity and values.

As conflict intensified, however, so did the emergence of a gendered worldview predicated on masculine and feminine approaches to organizational leadership and decision-making. This led to subsequent conflict and divisiveness that threatened the organization of Guardians. A Coordinated Management of Meaning intervention would trace individual stages of meaning beginning with member worldview. Taking time for such reflection and self-reporting might emphasize individual differences in the construction of meanings. While useful in conveying multiple interpretations of events, CMM lacks a social justice context within a hierarchy of social power.

Summary of the Social Group and Work Group Level

Conflict analysis at the social group and work group level moves the emphasis of conflict from the individual to the interaction between individuals. Incorporating outside influences and deepening the analysis of organizational conflict beyond the

blame of any single person increases the possibilities for conflict resolution intervention. What seems most intriguing in Guardians is that a gendered social identity is so deeply embedded, yet unacknowledged, in this organization. Gender identity is fervently and implicitly assumed by some and not by others. Viewing this conflict quickly, one would wonder—what is it about cats, that compels these people to fight each other so relentlessly? Without introducing a gender perspective, the conflict appears trivial. The social justice focus on social identity—especially gender—draws attention to characteristics of this organization not traditionally described in the organizational conflict literature.

The very essence of this organization is about domestic animals and their care as if they were family members. Initially, this volunteer organization functioned around the values of its members in a consensual, non-authoritarian, friendship association based on implicit commonality. At first it seems unclear—they are not openly working on behalf of gender or feminism—they are working on behalf of cats. The conflicts experienced by Guardians during the growth and development of the organization confirms many of the current theories in the organizational conflict literature that were outlined in the literature review section. The behavior of Guardians' members confirms Kreisberg's (1982) findings that conflict increases consciousness and facilitates the explicit development of social identity. While Guardians' members did not openly acknowledge social identity during the conflict, values based upon gender identity emerged in their focus group session. This result endorses the work of Cook-Huffman (2000) regarding conflict and the relevance of social identity. Using Cook-Huffman's fixed and fluid social identity frames to explain the meaning of conflict sheds light on

the significance of gender in the care taking, nurturing ideology shaping the process and content of decisions.

This study also confirms the distinction of work and social groups established by Marion Iris Young (1990). Guardians underwent multiple group formations throughout its development. Initially it formed as an interest group, and upon incorporation it emerged as an ideological group. Members who just wanted to save cats would certainly not wage the same battle to control the organization as members with a political agenda. An understanding of social groups related to oppression draws relevance to social justice and the influence of social processes and relationships. In this study field theory analysis relates climate and perceptions of defensiveness and supportiveness to the process of *Robert's Rules of Order* and the values of a feminist ideology-based organization. At the same time, this conflict exposes the limits of game theory; an explanation based on members competing for their own winning outcome was insufficient. The Coordinated Management of Meaning perspective lends a step-by-step framework to construct the meaning of conflict related to individual and organizational identity and supplements the Cook-Huffman research on the contribution of conflict to social identity development.

Analysis at the social group and work group levels leads into systemic and structural accountability of everyday organizational experiences, which becomes fitting as Guardians incorporates into a formal entity. Individual, social group and work group level analyses are helpful to chart organizational development from the initial, informal, individual stakeholder orientation of the organization to the more formal, group-based, organizational identity. A multilevel organizational analysis provides comparative

values that match stages of organizational maturation. In the next section, I will complete this analysis with a discussion of the systemic and structural conflict levels in Guardians.

Guardians' Conflict at the Structural/Systemic Level

Analyzing conflict through structural components and systemic processes provides a way to connect organizational rules, roles, resources, routines and relationships to the Guardians' conflict. In this case, conflict emanated in the shift from an informal, loosely knit group to a formal, rule-bound corporation with hierarchical, authoritative structure. The new meeting process structure, *Robert's Rules of Order*, narrowed collective communication and broadened individual control. Although money had once been a scarce resource, Rachel's corporate donation coupled with Frances' personal donations and interest in securing monetary stability for incorporation changed their financial outlook. These are examples of changes in the organizational structure of rules and resources, which according to Martin (1994), represent structural modifications that impact relationship networks, and determine deeper issues and contradictions within the dominant system.

Dispute Systems Design

Initially, Guardians might have benefited from a dispute systems design setting up internal mechanisms to emphasize broader systemic and structural influences and minimize personal blame. Such an intervention would have required that they hire an outside consultant and secure member interest. Conducted in the early stages of conflict,

an objective third party might have identified rules and processes detrimental to their current operation and projected growth. A systems design would have facilitated the development of more inclusive, conscientious processes and relationships.

However, as Putnam (2000) points out, an overly formal, rational approach is unequipped to address complex issues that change over time, such as the evolving conflict seen in Guardians. For example, many members felt extremely emotional and passionate about their work, and this is often difficult to mediate in an objective dispute systems design. Also, it would be challenging for an internal dispute mechanism to address power differentials packed within the social identity dynamics inherent to Helga and Veronica. As I will discuss more fully in the following theme section, it is beyond the capacity of a fixed dispute mechanism to fully address internal contradictions and fractures in the underlying value system that occurred in Guardians.

Structuration

Different levels of awareness and action operated within Guardians. Most group members fixated in what Giddens (1984) called practical consciousness—a clear understanding of what was going on without taking action. While members wanted to support the cats, they felt intimidated by the conflict dynamics. Helga and Gertrude seemed unconscious of the implicit mission assumed by the majority of its members as well as the perception of their violations. In a striking model of what Giddens calls discursive consciousness, Frances displayed a profound sense of awareness and capacity to take action. It is also possible that Frances was outraged by what she perceived as unfairness inflicted on the group by Helga and Gertrude. As Bell (1997)

claimed, such characteristics may reflect a highly developed social justice consciousness. In terms of a consciousness-raising intervention, it is doubtful Helga and Gertrude would cooperate with an effort that might scrutinize their behaviors (at least as long as they were in charge).

Administration

While Guardians is a female-dominant organization with leadership positions comprised entirely of women rather than men, the women in charge operated in male-defined ways to reproduce a hierarchy of social dominance. Helga conducted business in an overly rational, objective manner and controlled power over decision-making processes and outcomes. In a dominant male-oriented, insular-management style, Helga and Gertrude executed decisions privately and secretly and disregarded relationships at the micro level, while appearing compliant with Guardians' rules. In response to this, Frances achieved an informal network providing a counter-structure and system of relationships to oppose their rule.

Summary of the Structural/Systemic Level

Analyzing conflict at the structural/systemic level completes a greater understanding of organizational dynamics. Its most helpful dimensions include a way to trace actual organizational practices, policies and procedures for conflict sources. Coupled with social identity awareness, a structural/systemic analysis provides powerful ways to diagnose organizational conflict beyond the individual. This suggests interventions including organizational inventories to expose internal barriers and build

mechanisms to bring attention to problems, along with vibrant communication systems to encourage exchanges between members that stimulate change.

The Guardians' conflict shows that a dispute systems design would possibly perpetuate more of the same rational objectivity that was so offensive to most of the membership with *Robert's Rules of Order*. The concept of consciousness provides an interesting opportunity to bring the membership closer to understanding each other. Unfortunately, the leadership in Guardians is living up to the typical norm—unavailable to the greater organization and insulated in its decision-making processes.

While it has not been the purpose of this study to offer an exhaustive in-depth application of a level-by-level organizational conflict analysis of Guardians, the preceding framework captures multiple views confirming how organizational conflict operates in complex dimensions conducive to multidimensional analysis. Each approach gives partial explanations but none are adequately complex. Given this level-by-level overview of the Guardians' organizational conflict, I now turn my attention to specific findings that the literature does not address and answer my original research questions.

Research Question Number One:
What is the Role of Conflict in This Organization?

This research question is driven by my quest to find value in conflict as a tool for organization development. So much conflict in organizations is smoothed over, avoided, or blamed on personality problems. Safe harbors for fostering the opportunity of conflict and disentangling its deeper meanings do not exist in most organizations. Bottom-line solutions are immediately sought to restore harmony and establish equilibrium at the first sign of disorder. Venturing to the edges of conflict in order to

see what might surface is far too uncertain and too uncomfortable for people in most organizations. Unfortunately, resolution is traditionally imposed prematurely in an effort to keep the peace, and in so doing, routines are uninterrupted, patterns of reproduction continue, creativity is stifled, and the status quo is maintained and the deeper sources of conflict continue to fester.

Acknowledging that most organizations avoid conflict, what is particularly exciting about the Guardians' study is the level to which members dared to tangle with it. Conflict bubbled up and I saw an effort to control it before it took on a life of its own. Once differences between members became obvious, a coalition organized around a different set of beliefs and values. Issues clarified, individual and organizational identity redefined, collective voices amplified, and a strategic takeover "coup" was accomplished. Following seizure, the group re-formed and adapted into a new entity. Essentially, conflict provided the impetus for development and change, forced the emergence of a new identity, interrupted the status quo, and established a new order.

In this series of formidable events, conflict defined significant differences within the group, and in turn, revealed deeper, underlying ideologies that provoked even more conflict. Initially, members could have walked away. It is very likely that if they had not been willing to work through conflict their organization would have ceased existence. Conflict clarified the vision of their larger organizational identity and redefined the ultimate mission of their work. Members were compelled to fight for what they cared about, so I surmise that conflict actually saved this organization.

Conflict Surfaced Contradictions of Values, Decisions and Procedures

This study captures the growth of a volunteer organization, from its informal beginnings to formal incorporation, from one with few resources to one with growing resources. A significant change in development occurred when Gertrude instituted formal, parliamentary procedures to conduct meetings via *Robert's Rules of Order* and formalized relationships previously understood as friendships. The nature of leadership changed from a shared process in which decisions were made infrequently and loosely to an organization where a formally-elected president presided over formal procedures with protocols, officers, and committees, and with a formal mechanism to make decisions.

While such formalization did not cause the conflict, the use of its formal mechanism, *Robert's Rules of Order*, contributed to the conflict. *Robert's Rules of Order* is a male, white, business-minded, formal, meeting structure easily adapted into an instrument of control for those in charge. While members weren't opposed to order or formalized decision making, they were opposed to a mode of control that violated their implicit value for processes reflecting cooperation and care. Through the use of *Robert's Rules of Order*, Helga was able to impose her solutions. In doing so, she defied the explicit organizational goals (by not taking care of the cats) that were understood by most of its members. At the same time, she violated implicit organizational values by imposing decisions on the group through a linear, authoritarian process.

By cutting off care to cats, Helga violated Guardians' brand new 501©3 tax status secured under incorporation. If kittens died, Guardians would not have fulfilled its nonprofit tax obligation, thus threatening suspension of nonprofit status. Catching

Helga violate the tax obligation illuminated a tremendous contradiction in the organization's mission and provided justification for her expulsion. Helga had relentlessly blamed members for their lack of compliance with rules and regulations. Now she was exposed, not just for the violation of implicit process values, but for the violation of explicit compliance with fundamental laws that accompanied their new tax status.

When Rachel attended her first meeting, she was appalled at the evident clash between organizational mission and individual values. She had been presented a view of the organization from Frances that was in total contradiction of what she experienced in the setting of a formal meeting. Cutting off medical care to cats outrageously contradicted their explicit mission and promise to the public. A double contradiction occurred along a deeper interest: "Who is Helga to be cutting off anything?" The split between vision and mission on one hand, and process on the other, spurred members to collaborate, network, and gain a sense of democratic empowerment. While *Robert's Rules of Order* was viewed by Helga and Gertrude as a rational, objective, systematic meeting structure to share power across the organization, it also served as an inflexible infrastructure to reinforce exclusive decision-making powers of the leadership. What Guardians was about and how they were going to conduct business became the bigger struggle.

Frances exposed these contradictions in governance and values. Coupled with Helga's blatant failure to live up to her own explicit standards, member support was easily mobilized to remove Helga from power. In a brilliant resolution of conflict, a

sophisticated network executed a fascinating coup utilizing Helga's own weapon of control—*Robert's Rules of Order*—to reclaim the organization.

Conflict Forced Clarification of Organizational Identity and Redefined Mission

The Guardians' conflict also charts the evolution of an organizational identity, "Who are we as an organization?" Members rose to the challenges brought forth by this conflict because they cared deeply about the issues and were confronted with a key choice: "Do I change the organization or do I leave it?" This became the crux of the conflict—whether they were going to depart or do whatever was required to transform the organization. At this critical juncture, most members agreed that change was necessary. The negative, out-going phone message blatantly violated the implicit values most members shared as an organization and set up a simmering discontent that later developed into an outright battle over cutting off medical care to cats. Many members felt they had invested large amounts of time, energy and personal capital in the organization and were determined to not walk away from the conflict. When such discontent usually occurs in an all-volunteer organization, people stop attending. In this conflict, however, Frances aroused the commitment of others to clarify their deeper values in relationship to the greater organizational identity. Once established, she led the charge to reclaim their organization.

Research Question Number Two: What is the Relationship Between Conflict in the Social Self and the Organizational Structure?

This question is motivated by my interest in de-emphasizing the individual and linking conflict to the organizational system and structure, social group membership and society. While multiple components contribute to the complex composite of conflict, interplay exists between personal identity, social identity, and organizational identity. Once the Guardians' conflict exposed member's differences, the opportunity for emphasizing those differences intensified and the progression of conflict forced clarity of values and beliefs at the individual, social group, work group, and organizational levels, and accelerated identity development.

Unexpectedly, gender emerged not only as a social identity, but as the basis for ideology as well. The conflict exposed a deeper feminist belief structure that may have been unconsciously in operation over a number of years. While never challenged in the past, many group members had assumed everyone shared an overall value for care and connection. It was not until the strong adherence to *Robert's Rules of Order* was imposed on the group that these differences became grossly evident. *Roberts' Rules of Order* reinforced a masculine-oriented hierarchy of command and control that collided with the implicit feminist identity of most members who valued care and connection.

Gender differences made obvious through decision-making processes triggered gender differences as an ideology. The organization then reeled into questions such as who they were individually and socially (personal and social identity) as well as who they were as an organization (organizational identity). Ideology grew in prominence as to how they dealt with each other (processes) to what they did for work (mission, goals) and to who they were as an organization (organizational identity). Feminist beliefs lay

at the foundation of their animal beliefs and behaviors (vegetarianism, animal welfare, animal rights) and as conflict developed, so did their feminism.

The deeper feminist belief structure set up expectations; members will not treat animals one way and people another. Helga violated the unspoken belief and behavior structure by cutting off medical care to kittens, which was at the heart of their organizational identity. This action became a behavioral litmus test that highlighted dual contradictions around cats and gender.

Gender Operated as Both a Social Identity and an Ideology

Gender emerged as the dominant social identity in this organization. Gender was informed by an implicit feminism linked to a care-taking, nurturing ideology for animal welfare and shaped the processes by which decisions were made. Feminism was not an explicit, but rather an implicit ideology reflecting a deeply held set of beliefs that were not accessed until violated. Helga's fur coat was a violation of their explicit mission and members declared she should not wear fur when she represented their organization. When Helga violated their care taking procedures, however, members would not evoke any explicit action except that it just did not feel right. Members' values were challenged but no organizational response could be taken. Gender embedded itself within the congruence of complex organizational processes based on implicit values.

In thinking about gender styles in organizations and organizational climate—an underlying question that emerges is whether or not people bring in "other" identities, particularly into an organization that is normalized around white, educated, middle class identities. Is there a norm about not bringing in other identities that would disrupt or

challenge the predominant worldview? For example, Seneca had asked Gertrude for a hug after a testy committee meeting and was rejected—Gertrude exclaimed she didn't even hug her own cat! Still yet, Zen (one of the few men) was pulled in exclusively to face off with Helga and solve their problems. Zen had no ideological connection to Guardians and joined only to serve an operational function—he knew the loopholes in *Robert's Rules of Order*.

This provokes an inquiry about the way in which social identities play out with the multiple layers of conflict as well as the basis for resolution. When we are looking at the “multiple-ness” of organizational issues in conflict, differences in social identity are de-emphasized and surrendered to an overall organizational identity. Does this create an overarching social identity reflecting the white, middle class, educated, comfortable status of its most powerful members? In the course of conflict, what happens to other identities? The Guardians' conflict was structured around ideology tested behaviorally and procedurally in relationship to contradictions in the deeper belief structure. A parallel analysis could be explored between gender and middle class, but is not in the scope of this study.

A Feminist Care and Connection Collided with Hierarchical Command and Control

What actually triggered the organizational conflict in Guardians? Was it the explicit violation of their mandate to take care of as many cats as they could? Or was it a violation of their implicit values of care and connection, cooperation, consensus, and sharing in an organization that cared about each other? While it is hard to resolve these questions, the conflict became so explosive because both issues compounded it.

All these multiple factors operating at once make the Guardians' conflict both interesting and messy. Throughout the course of this conflict, a desirable organizational climate was never quite accomplished. For example, was it acceptable to hug each other, bring children with toys to meetings, and make small talk about each other's lives? Where was the line drawn on expectations for care and connection in the course of organizational function? What made some members talk about the organization being "cold" and wanting to drop out, while others did not feel the same concern? Most members expected a high level of sharing and connecting and an over-emphasis on *Robert's Rules of Order* created barriers to these interactions.

Curious about the source of this recurring theme of care, I found myself pouring through any possible correlation to vegetarianism, animal welfare and animal rights. To my surprise, I happened upon the introduction of a book edited by a noted animal rights author, Carol Adams, in which I found a dedication to Seneca, a member in Guardians. She had never disclosed this information to me during the course of her interview or her work in the group. Adams (1996) acknowledged Seneca as the former president of a feminist animal rights organization and thanked her for being the catalyst for an entire collection of animal advocacy books dedicated to an ethic of care versus rights.

Apparently, Seneca expressed a desire to see more written on the emotional component of animal-human relationships. Adams wrote that Seneca thought most women were uncomfortable with the dominant rights-based framework and leaned more naturally towards care-based feminism in their work with animals. The Adams book is a collection of essays arguing against an animal "rights" approach that discounts emotions, because such emotions are an important component of relationships with

animals and an ongoing factor in animal abuse and exploitation. The discovery of the Adams book confirmed to me that the Guardians' ethic of care and connection, indeed, is intentional bedrock of their ideology.

In discussing the ethic of care, Adams made reference to Carol Gilligan's (1982) work on decision-making based on a masculine orientation for justice and a more feminine orientation for care. Cormier (1993) noted that while this is "gender-related," it is not necessarily "gender-specific," thus establishing a context for the different gender approaches displayed by Guardians' members. Lyons (1983) confirmed the Gilligan relationship mode based on connection rather than objectivity and supplemented the literature by describing "objective" people who made decisions based on justice and "connected" people who operated on concern for others.

Lyons (1983) found that "objective" types operated from a sense of justice based on rules and obligations, whereas "connected" types operate from a sense of care based on building relationships and eliminating hurt. Lyons made reference to gender orientation for these distinctions, which sets a context for the variations in Guardians' approaches. Helga could very likely be operating from her sense of justice, objectivity, rules and obligations. At the same time, within the framework developed by Lyons, I could determine how Seneca and Frances operated from their sense of care, connection and regard for others. Of course, each would think the other was in opposition to their preferred modes and, as a result, they would consistently clash on the process of how business was conducted.

Research Question Number Three: What do Routines and Relationships
Contribute to the Expression and Suppression of
Organizational Conflict—and Vice Versa?

This question is motivated by my interest in uncovering taken-for-granted routines and relationships that co-create conflict and maintain conditions to serve those in social dominance.

Routines Unraveled and Relationships Reformed to
Reclaim the Organization

In the case of Guardians, conflict unraveled traditional routines and reformed relationships that enabled the membership-at-large to successfully identify and interrupt counterproductive patterns and to reclaim and reorganize their organization. Through the course of conflict, the birthing of an organization occurs from an ad hoc, person-driven, volunteer effort to an official entity. Initially confusion surfaces about decision-making between meetings and a lack of clear role boundaries in the conflict forces clarification.

What keeps members together is unspoken until conflict pushes them to the edges of organization dissolution. Most members are vegetarians, most are “closet” feminists and most believe in nonviolent processes and connections. Once members determined a threat to their unspoken value system, they reformed and reinforced their relationships in the throes of a secret shadow system. In joining forces, they were able to amplify their power and project a new vision for the organization. Their relationships were “generative” (Lane & Maxfield, 1996) in that a direction emerged out of new ideas generated from newly formed relationships; Rachel and Zen partnered with Frances and Veronica to overthrow the authoritarian system. These relationships formed

for the distinct strategic purpose of reorganizing Guardians around a revitalized mission. Employing a “hit team” approach, they were able to seize power in a spectacular coup.

Informal relationships forged strong opposition to the formal organization. According to Stacy (1996), such a shadow system thrives creatively and passionately without rules and regulations; this is the space in which diversity and change occurs. While their alliance was not openly discussed in committee meetings, Frances, Veronica and Rachel spent every night plotting on the phone with each other. The formal organization fueled their work in the shadows and generated new relational bonds that eventually brought them into power.

Research Conclusions

As I began to observe this organization, I thought about their mission: What is it about cats? Why put all this energy into saving cats? Why all this passion toward cats when the world is falling apart? Further into the study I sensed something bigger than cats driving them. As the conflict unfolded, deeper values emerged to reveal an ethic of care and connection. I soon realized that it is not just about cats, it is about the treatment of animals that is rooted in a revolutionary perspective linked to nonviolence. While the larger politics do not readily resonate within the organization, conflict is driven by their passion behind the work that matters. Most people would have walked away from an all-volunteer organization embroiled in such ongoing conflict. Frances, however, aroused members to reorganize around their deeper ideology on how to be in the world

that shows no distinction between how humans treat animals and how we treat each other.

In a non-harming, nonviolent manner, Frances and her allies utilized the very system in place to overthrow the system. Plotting at night on the phone, they engaged in meaningful conversations and generated a coalition that amplified their power to interrupt the pattern of “business as usual” which was reproduced through the masculine norms of *Robert’s Rules of Order*. Executing a stunning power coup consistent with their values of non-violence, this conflict clarified their values, got them in touch with their identity, and transformed their operation.

This study is a fabulous display of what is typically avoided in organizations—venturing to the edge of conflict where change exists! By fighting for what they cared about and reorganizing around those values, conflict became essential to the survival of this organization. This raises a bigger question to non-profit organizations. If people are not getting paid, how are their needs met? For some people may be the passion to make the world a better place and create change. For other people it may be a need to feel important (sometimes at the expense of others). This conflict shed light on contradictions, clarified who they were (social identity), and how they operated (gendered processes) by what mattered to them (ideology).

While I was not explicitly looking for issues of gender and ideology, I had anticipated that social group memberships would be a part of conflict. From my work as a social justice educator, I assume an orientation that human actors are always raced, classed, gendered, sexually oriented, etc., so I expected some dimension of social identity would surface. Although there might be some rich data to show ways in which

class and other identities manifest within this particular conflict, class actually became invisible in light of larger issues. I did not expect to find the linkage between gender identity and ideology that held the organization together, nor did I expect to find such a strong core of ideology in a volunteer organization. The relationship between social identity and ideology could be an extremely rich area of study for volunteer political and social action groups.

Originally, I came into this study wanting to obtain a more complex way of analyzing and understanding organizational conflict. I initiated my research on the assumption that it was likely that a single level of analysis—individual only, work group only, social group only, etc., was not enough to truly understand conflict in organizations. I have found that complex, multi-level analysis is very important and may reflect the extent to which an organization progresses in development from a loosely individual-based affiliation to a more structured entity. This conflict illuminates the valuable nature of conflict as a tool for organization development. The Guardians conflict helped to emphasize differences and reveal underlying ideology and in doing so clarified individual, social, and organizational identity. By surfacing implicit and explicit contradictions, members were able to maximize conflict to unravel routines and reform relationships to reclaim their organization. Pushing the edges of conflict, they were able to unleash creativity and fight for what mattered.

Implications for Practice

The underlying theme for this dissertation has been, “How can one make the analysis of conflict as complex as the conflict is likely to be?” An underlying set of

questions has to do with the complexity by which conflict plays out in organizations and how social identity may or may not interact. Gender emerged as both an identity and an ideology (feminism), a caring for each other as well as a caring for animals. Helga violated the feminist norm and the organizational norm. Wearing fur and not taking care of kittens were both implicit and explicit violations.

This study has implications for grassroots organizations going through the process of formalization and demonstrates conflict in context with member's values and how business is conducted. The agreements in Guardians were so implicit that members never processed or examined them. It is common for people in organizations to come together, form a group around an issue, bump up against different values, avoid the ensuing conflict, and walk away. However, conflict is what crystallizes values. An implication for practice is for organizations to facilitate discussions around meaning and purpose to set the groundwork for communicating in the early stages of organizing. This early exposure to differences in deep values would clarify vision—what matters individually should be taken into account with the entire organization. Through this exercise, members would experience not only how they are similar but also how they are different from each other and how they can foster those differences in view of their collective mission. When a conflict does emerge, members will have a supportive infrastructure to contain adversity and uncertainty.

In this study, I am not just suggesting a view of conflict in the manner of complex levels to just re-package the existing literature. I am also not merely suggesting extending the current literature with a social justice frame. I am recommending that organizations take inventory and examine the external, explicit frameworks surrounding

complex, implicit social processes. Organizations must ask difficult questions at an organizational identity level—"What matters to us and how do we do it?" Then an organization must help members to appreciate both individual and social identity by asking, "Who am I and what matters to me?" as well as "Who are we and what's worth doing together?" Such an approach parallels the conflict goal work of Wilmot and Hocker (2000), who identified four goal areas: content, relationship, identity and process. Parties are encouraged to ask what they want to achieve in the resolution of conflict. A great benefit exists in facilitating priority sessions with members so clarity could be determined before conflicts reel out of control.

Finally, in the spirit of social justice, what are the social and organizational barriers to these visions? For example, how do members express management styles on a continuum of masculinity and femininity without being judged negatively as powerless or over-emotional? How does linguistic diversity overcome routine monocultural communication channels? The integration of the individual with social and organizational identities will complement the mission of the organization. The Guardians conflict shows the importance of risking conflict and endorses ways to maximize conflict for organization development. To accomplish such sensitive processing, an organization must set up the critical conditions where people can safely build relationships. This means internal routine processing that includes structured dialogues, meaning-seeking exercises (retreats) and development time for personal vision statements as well as organizational vision statements.

Unanswered Questions and Future Research Possibilities

Is there a dimension of ideology in an all-volunteer organization that is distinct from its mission or goal? My conflict literature review, along with most of what I had read about conflict did not prepare me to think about ideology. An all-volunteer group like the Guardians' animal welfare organization occupies overlapping space between generic organizations with mission/goals and political organizations like the Democratic/Republican Party. There is a parallel, underlying ideology in large organizations such as the Democratic, Republican, and Green Party as well as in small, locally based organizations such as a church, where one can talk about an ideology of being "born again."

What seems new and interesting here is a notion of ideology distinctly different from the organizational mission. One could say, "Are you really an animal rights advocate?" This is different from saying, "Are you really a corporate employee?" In the same sense, it is not an either/or position, whether you are an animal rights advocate or a corporate employee. Health care workers and educators experience the same sort of care-taking conflicts inside organizations operating on a continuum of individual and organizational values. It seems important to look at values and how they are enacted within organizations. This is what Frances was so successful at—teasing out the deeper meaning and contradictions within the organization. The mission statement was not going to move members, so she aroused what mattered to them—their ideology.

The organizational conflict literature describes conflict in partial explanations that do not address the multi-level complexity in which organizations operate. What appears to be missing is a focus on ideology, especially with non-profit and volunteer

organizations. The concept of ideology exists in politics and religion and it may be of substantive value to introduce ideology to intentional organizations that have a values-oriented or ideological basis for cohesion. As we saw in Guardians, ideology became the major basis of cohesion throughout conflict.

While this dissertation is rooted in a framework of organizational conflict and social justice, these findings also lead into an exciting new area of organization development rooted in the metaphors of complex adaptive systems (Eoyang, 1997; Wheatley, 1999; Stacy, Griffin & Shaw, 2000; Olson & Eoyang, 2001). In the physical sciences, complex adaptive systems (living organisms such as the nervous system or the immune system) evolve over time in emergent, unpredictable ways in which order comes out of disorder. Beyond the scope of this current study, elements in the Guardians conflict appear to fit such an application in that a new order of organization emerged out of the disorder. Analyzing Guardians as a CAS would provide an interesting side study analysis.

For example, Margaret J. Wheatley (1999), an organizational management consultant, charges that organizations strive to maintain artificial cultures of stability, in contrast to living systems that thrive on non-equilibrium and interact with the outside environment to generate growth. Wheatley gives language to the experience of conflict as non-equilibrium and the untapped outside resource of social identity differences that organizations fail to utilize. Wheatley goes on to say organizations should strive for growth rather than regulation as well as a new appreciation for disorder.

The Guardians conflict set off an alarm for change; the more Helga sought regulation, the more she cultivated disorder. Wheatley claims that disorder inspires a

deeper sense of identity that leads a system to change in order to survive; a change motivated by what is meaningful. The more Helga tried to control the organization—the more she threatened their survival, and the more Frances tapped into their identity—the more members determined what was most meaningful.

The Guardians' conflict provided just enough disorder to create a new order. In a traditional organization driven by profit, management may have intervened to interrupt the take-over and essentially smoothed over the conflict. This would have aborted the reorganization effort and the opportunity to strengthen the organization. While two Guardians' members were lost, the organization as a whole survived. Conflict facilitates opportunities for systems and structures that are looking for new opportunities of renewal. While complex adaptive system models present an intriguing new way to explore conflict in organizations, I would contextualize such an approach with a social justice perspective.

The Guardians' conflict also demonstrates an effective model of feminist resistance to unilateral, masculine-oriented control of an organization. Reuther and Fairhurst (2000) stated that conflict provides an entry point to reveal deeply embedded dominant, masculine organizational processes and structures. In turn, this entry point provides an opportunity to rethink and reorganize around feminist values of care and cooperation. We saw this occur in Guardians when Helga imposed decisions on the group regarding medical care to cats. In this example, conflict aroused re-definition of the organization by its members and in doing so revealed contradictions in how business was being conducted. According to Reuther and Fairhurst, a natural self-organizing occurs as a system encounters disequilibrium (conflict). The membership of

Guardians banded together to address the conflict in ways that reflected their values. This demonstrates that by encouraging conflict and maximizing critical choice points, traditionally entrenched, dominant organizational patterns can be re-engineered.

Reuther and Fairhurst go on to say that conflict periods provide opportunities to confront socially unjust practices involving gender, race, class, age, and sexual orientation. It would have taken a more aggressive intervention to address issues around class and education in Guardians. Oppressive routines can be interrupted to form new relationships and systems (Tong, 1989). Rachel, Frances, Veronica and Zen reformed relationships to accomplish their desired outcome. When organizational members locate and challenge critical relationships, even small interventions can lead to power shifts that will create large, systemic changes (Reuther & Fairhurst, 2000). The organization elections provided an intervention to shift power and change the course of their organization's development.

Finally, gender in relationship to conflict in organizations deserves further exploration. Researchers must look more closely at gendered patterns, listen more closely to gendered narratives, understand gendered processes and unpack what is involved in gendered change initiatives. Masculine norms embedded in organizational processes are taken for granted and are routinely manifest in organizations like Guardians. Nonprofit organizations provide compelling opportunities to study these complex processes and generate ideas for creative organization development.

Critical Reflections

Reflecting back on this study, I appreciate its illustration of what I am arguing—to capture the complexity in conflict. It is rare to see actual, in-the-moment conflict portrayed in organizational conflict research. Traditional ethnography tends to portray conflict as part of something else, as in the retelling of a ritual. Tremendous value exists in realizing that this study is the actual unfolding of a real conflict, instead of one dependent upon third party recall. While research indicates that people tend to reaffirm beliefs when their values are violated, it is rare to actually see this retold in conflict research by actors-in-the-moment.

Additionally, this study in organizational conflict reveals the power of hegemony and why people tend to avoid conflict. People carry multiple identities into organizations and modify their identity depending upon the situation at hand. Unfortunately, the Guardians' conflict culminates in two members leaving, which is a loss to the overall organization for the sake of conflict resolution. While such an outcome does not endorse reform around the like-minded, such actions lead to key questions. Under what conditions would conflict not be productive? How would this study have evolved had Helga and Gertrude not left? Is it possible for participants in conflict to retain their identities yet mutually reshape an organization?

Eliciting Critical Multipositionality in Research

At the conclusion of this study, I asked Frances to join me in reflecting on my role as a researcher and how Guardians' members perceived me, so that I might critically analyze my influence on the conflict. According to Frances, "You just fit in.

There was so much background noise. Everyone was locked into a grand performance. When you entered the group you asked permission. You were low key and polite. You didn't treat us like subjects to study. When you conducted interviews we felt important and heard."

In terms of the value this methodology brings to the study of conflict, I refer to it as *eliciting critical multipositionality in research*. In such studies, the researcher employs multiple, dynamic, facilitative methods to capture the various implicit and explicit dimensions of the conflict. The effectiveness of my research methodology was a confluence of organic processes common to conflict work. I attribute my success in capturing the multiple dimensions of this conflict, as well as the findings, to how I envision working with process in general. My ability to hold multiple critical positions at once, without privileging one over another, revealed multidimensional themes within events and a deeper understanding of the dynamics of conflict.

For others interested in replicating this type of study, I suggest that conflict and social justice frameworks provide a way to organize methods and analysis. However, once initiated, these frameworks are insufficient, and almost obstructive, as critical dimensions become evident. How I approached this research may be one aspect contributing to my ability to gather data. How Guardians' members perceived me may have been another contribution. I participated in Guardians' fundraisers. I established relationships based on reliability and trustworthiness. I maintained a position as a member while at the same time a position as a researcher.

This experience advocates for the expansion of methods and approaches to the study of conflict. Shifting lenses (organizational conflict levels and social justice)

provided a method without privileging one dimension over another. The way I interacted with the Guardians' group as a researcher provided a way to extract multiple layers of conflict, as opposed to relying on after-the-fact interviews. Using multiple frameworks showcased interaction, making it possible to discuss tensions among multiple dimensions of organizational conflict and essentially *capturing the complexity in conflict*.

APPENDIX A
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Consent for Overall Voluntary Organizational Participation

I—Joan Mikalson—am a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. For my dissertation research I have designed a qualitative study to focus on the complex dynamics of conflict within a nonprofit organization. The results of this research will contribute to a greater understanding of organizational conflict and its potential to build mission-critical organizational effectiveness and social responsibility.

I have chosen your organization, GUARDIANS, for my study. My purpose is not to examine the organization itself, but the nature of conflict within a nonprofit organization. Please review the following points of understanding and, as board members signify that you represent the overall willingness of your organization to voluntarily participate in this study.

GUARDIANS agrees to participate in this qualitative study and understands:

- 1) individual members are free to participate or not to participate without prejudice and will be asked to sign individual voluntary consent forms.***
- 2) individual members, as well as the organization as a whole, may withdraw from part or all of this study at any time.
- 3) the organization and its members' names will not be used, nor will they be identified in any way or at any time, aside from general identifiers.
- 4) Board members and elected officers may review any aspect of the data collection, with respect to individual confidentiality.
- 5) information from this study will be included in Joan Mikalson's dissertation and may also be included in materials for presentations and manuscripts submitted for publication to professional journals or other publishing organizations. Thus, the researcher has permission to use any of this information without further consent.
- 6) GUARDIANS will receive a copy of the final written document.

In signing this consent form, we agree to all the information outlined above. We are aware of the purpose of this study and how information will be used. In the capacity of GUARDIANS elected board members and officers, we agree to allow this researcher to work with GUARDIANS and to use this information.

Board Members/Officers: _____

Researcher: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Consent for Voluntary Individual Participation

I—Joan Mikalson—am a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. For my dissertation research I have designed a qualitative study to focus on the complex dynamics of conflict within a nonprofit organization. The results of this research will contribute to a greater understanding of organizational conflict and its potential to build mission-critical organizational effectiveness and social responsibility.

I am working with GUARDIANS for my study and, as a member, your participation is voluntary. Please review the following points of understanding and signify your willingness to participate.

I volunteer to participate in this qualitative study and understand that:

- 1) I am free to participate or to not participate without prejudice.
- 2) I may withdraw from part or all of this study at any time.
- 3) My name will not be used, nor will I be identified in any way, at any time. I understand that it will be necessary to describe participants in the dissertation by a number of social identities, such as gender, class, educational status, etc.
- 4) I may review any aspect of the data collection that relates to me specifically.
- 5) I understand that information from this study will be included in Joan Mikalson's dissertation and, subsequently, in materials for presentations and manuscripts submitted for publication to professional journals or other publishing organizations. Thus, the researcher has permission to use any of this information without further consent.
- 6) Participants have access to the final written document.

In signing this consent form, I am agreeing to all of the information outlined above, except for any changes that I may discuss with the researcher. I am aware of the purpose of this study, how information will be used, and I agree to allow the researcher to use this information.

Participant's signature

Date

Researcher's signature

Date

APPENDIX C
MISSION STATEMENT

GUARDIANS MISSION STATEMENT

Guardians will provide and promote humane treatment of animals by:

- *Providing temporary shelter, care and medical treatment to abandoned and unwanted companion animals in the immediate surrounding area.*
- *Coordinating abandoned animal adoptions and lost & found animal foster care.*
- *Presenting education programs and literature for the reduction of the local population of unwanted animals.*
- *Cooperating with veterinarians in humane education and euthanasia of hopelessly ill or injured animals.*

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